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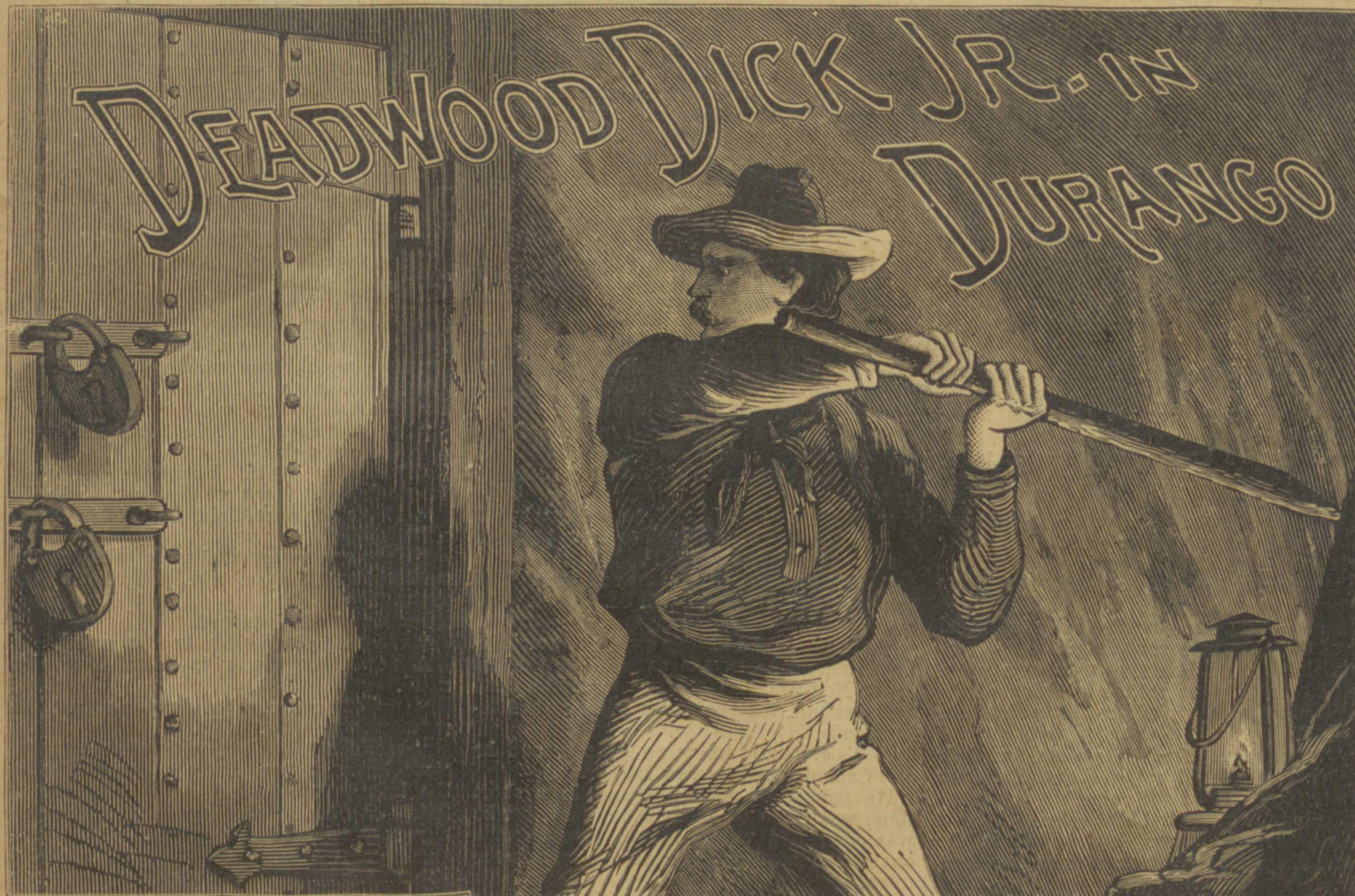
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OR,

"GATHERED IN."

BY ED. L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSE-BUD ROB" NOVELS, "SIERRA SAM" NOVELS, ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DURANGO.

DURANGO! Who has not heard of it? Blest with the lovely climate of Southern Colorado, it yet bears the reputation of being the toughest of tough towns.

It numbers, at this writing, about six hundred residents, to which is to be added a floating population of a couple of hundred more.

It has schools, a theater, and churches, yet it is the abode of about the hardest lot of citizens of

200
DICK, ELATED, SEIZED THE BAR, WENT BACK TO THE DOOR, AND UNDER HIS SAVAGE ATTACK THE LOCKS YIELDED.

the West, for the true "border ruffian," and gamblers, thieves and bummers abound here in profusion.

The adjacent mines yield well, while a big revenue comes from the cattle-ranches of the near valleys and foot-hills.

For six months antedating this record of events, the ranchmen had been losing horses and cattle, until it became, for them, an alarming state of affairs.

No clew to the thieves could be secured, although strenuous efforts were made to run them down. That it was a well-organized gang no one doubted, but where they disposed of their plunder was a mystery.

A Vigilance Committee finally was formed; private detectives were brought from Denver and the East, but all to no use; nothing could be discovered of the depredators.

Suspicion, however, at length fastened on a woman, or rather, a girl, whose real name was Bella Brennan, but who was known as Calamity Jane, Junior, as she possessed many of the personal characteristics of that once wonderful woman of the West.

She dressed like her original, and looked like her.

She could ride like a Comanche, could play the sport, and was reckless and fearless at all times, and dangerous when her anger or hate was aroused.

This remarkable young woman lived with her aged father, on the outskirts of the town, in a shanty that once had been partially destroyed by fire.

When the two first came to Durango they were poverty poor; they had no visible means of support, except the few dollars Calamity picked up at the gaming-table. The father was an invalid, yet, after a few months' residence there, the girl wore diamonds, and carried a big roll of money, which she took pride in displaying at every opportunity.

"Where did she get it?" was the general inquiry.

She spent it freely, yet she was never "broke."

She had been known to sit at a faro table, and come off five hundred dollars loser, yet treated the loss as nothing.

When questioned as to where she got her money, she would reply: "None of your business. I got it, and that is enough."

Suspicion, therefore, against her grew stronger and stronger.

Jim Jackson, the sheriff, finally informed her of these suspicions, adding:

"Calamity, I'd advise you to own up to the truth, and trust to the leniency of the people for mercy," advice at which she laughed.

"What care I for the people, or their opinions," she said. "Let them mind their own business, and I will mine."

The bubble began to boil harder.

A number of citizens congregated in the White Elephant Saloon, to discuss the situation.

"I b'lieve her to be guilty," declared Mayor Mike Murphy.

"So do I," assented Wesley Wyndham, a ranch-owner.

"Some action must be taken."

"But, what?"

"String her up!"

"But, we have no positive proof against her."

"What of that? We've got our opinions to back us. She's a sport, anyhow, and the community would be better without her, I suspect."

This man Wyndham was one of the richest dwellers around Durango. Besides his extensive cattle-range, he owned stock in several mines, and other enterprises, and had a handsome stone residence in the town. He was haughty and conceited, and was not generally popular.

The confab in the White Elephant did not

result in the formation of any definite plan of action.

It was resolved to let the matter simmer awhile, and see how things would shape. Calamity was not to be molested, but a surveillance was to be kept on her every movement.

A week passed by, with no further deprivations by the cattle-thieves.

Nor was Calamity detected in any suspicious circumstances or act. She roamed about as freely as ever, and spent her money liberally or recklessly.

Bella Brennan was a handsome girl, with a faultless form, and eyes dark and flashing.

She had suitors by the score, but showed no preference to any of them until Ned Brandon struck the town.

It was even reported that she could have made such an eligible match as Wesley Wyndham had she wished; but she decidedly gave him the "cold shoulder," and incurred his enmity thereby.

Ned Brandon was a tramp printer, and when he struck Durango, was in pretty bad shape. His boots were worn out, his clothes were ragged, and his hat was a wreck.

But, he was a stalwart, handsome young fellow of twenty-four, with a round, smooth, intelligent face, blue eyes, and sunny hair.

He had come to Durango, he announced, hoping to get a job on the local newspaper.

Calamity at once took a notion to him, and made his acquaintance.

"My name is Ned Brandon, and I am last from Leadville. Nearly all of the distance between here and there I have done on foot."

"Have you no money?"

"No. I have been unfortunate in not getting work."

"Do you expect to get any here?"

"I hope to."

"But not in such togs?"

Brandon smiled.

"They're the best I've got," he said.

"That may be, but you won't be able to strike a job in such duds. Come with me. You're square, and I'll fix you out."

Brandon always had been proud of his personal appearance, and it was humiliating now in the extreme, to be found clad like a beggar.

"You are very kind!" he said, "but I should feel much humbled to accept such a favor, even from a friend!"

"Have no fears. I am as much your friend as any one in Durango will be. Come with me."

He acquiesced and they repaired to a clothing-store, where, at the expense of the girl sport, Ned Brandon was fitted out in a good business suit, together with proper furnishing goods.

Ned's gratitude knew no bounds, and he and Calamity became fast friends.

He secured a good job, and, in a short time, was given an interest in the paper he was connected with, and, ere long, became one of the most popular young men in the town.

During this time the cattle depredations developed into startling losses, and public opinion, with no apparent good reason therefor, more and more turned against "the Brennan girl," as she was generally termed.

CHAPTER II.

A CALL UPON BRENNAN.

A GENERAL meeting was at length held, to determine what was to be done.

The committee agreed that no time was to be lost. Action must be taken at once.

Jim Jackson, the sheriff, volunteered to lead a gang to old Brennan's shanty, and a posse was, accordingly, made up; that comprised the worst element of the town.

The party was formed very quietly, however, and as quietly made for the objective point of their journey, at about the midnight hour.

It was a beautiful night, the moon at its

full, and all the stars alight with their torches; yet these lawless men, half crazed with drink, were marching forward to commit a revolting crime, the avowed purpose being to hang a young and beautiful woman upon the mere suspicion of her being in league with the steer buccaneers.

The home of the Brennans had once been a large shanty with two "L's," or wings. Both of these had been so injured by fire as to be no longer habitable.

The main portion of the building remained intact, with a veranda and a little yard in front.

The place was once owned by an old miser named Spicer, who had been murdered for his money, and whose wraith was said to still haunt the premises. After his death, the place stood idle until the Brennans came along and appropriated it to their own use.

The night being so pleasant, old Brennan still occupied his easy-chair upon the veranda, when the lynching-party approached.

He was a man close upon sixty years of age, with long hair and beard that was silvery white.

He had once been of superb strength and stature, but, unfortunately, now was a paralytic and therefore utterly helpless.

Who he was, or where he came from, more than that he claimed his name was Brennan, no one could ascertain.

He was cold and repellent in manner, and yet polite in address, using good language, and to all intents, had once been a man of means and influence.

When the Vigilantes reached the shanty, Jim Jackson opened the gate and advanced up the little graveled walk.

"Hello, Brennan!" he saluted.

"Good-evening, sir," returned Brennan.

"A nice evening."

"Be-utiful!" replied Jackson. "Just a lovely night for a picnic. Couldn't wish for a better. You're lookin' well."

"Perhaps; but appearances are very deceptive. I am anything but that."

"Paralysis no better, eh?"

"No, and never will be. I suffer more than you can guess."

"No doubt of it. I suppose you sometimes wish that you were dead."

"I have often thought I would be better off."

"Have you any special preference for the method in which you take your earthly departure?"

Brennan looked startled.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

A new light began to dawn upon his mind.

"In God's name, what do you mean?" he repeated, excitedly.

"Well," said Jackson with a brutal laugh, "we knew of your desire to shuffle off into the bright future, and concluded that, as fellow-citizens, it was our duty to lend you any assistance in our power. Our appliances are not numerous, but we have a reliable Taos lariat, and can give you a choice between that and a 36-caliber Smith and Wesson! Now, which do you prefer?"

"Good God! You do not mean to murder me?" gasped Brennan.

"Not if you come to our terms."

"What are they?"

"That you produce that gal of yours, or inform me where to find her."

"I cannot answer either question. She went off on horseback, early in the evening, as I sat dozing here. Where she went, except into Durango, I do not know."

"You lie, you old fossil! You know where she is this very moment!"

"As God is my judge I do not. I never can keep track of her."

"That will do to tell the marines, but it don't go down with us. That gal is a horse and cattle-thief, and we are goin' to lynch her same as we're goin' ter lynch you if ye don't give her up."

"It is false!" Brennan cried, furiously. "My daughter is the soul of honor and honesty."

"That will have to be proved in the next world," returned Jackson, brutally. "It won't stand wash here, however. Boyees, half of ye attend to gittin' the rope ready. Yonder is a very good limb."

"The Lord have mercy on your souls!" groaned poor, harmless Brennan. "Would you attack an innocent and helpless man in this way? Do you call yourselves men?"

"Well, I reckon we come pretty near it," retorted Jackson. "Get the rope ready, boys. The other half of you search the house from top to bottom, for Calamity."

The order was obeyed, while Jim Jackson sat down on a stump, lit his pipe, and calmly supervised the proceedings.

Part of the gang disappeared within the house; the others produced a lariat, and flung it over the limb of a convenient tree, forming a noose at one end.

"There, that will do," said Jackson, removing the pipe from his mouth. "We will give the old man a few minutes' respite, while they are looking for the gal. In the mean time you'd better pray, Daddy."

The searchers soon reappeared.

Calamity Jane, Jr. was not to be found about the premises.

Bill Van Alstine, champion fighter of the gang, reported the result.

"Nary hide nor hair of her. We've been thr'u' the old tub from top to bottom, but the gal is not to be found. She has got wind of this, and taken a skip—now take my word for it. So ye can do what ye want about the old man."

"Fetch him out here!" commanded Jackson, removing the pipe from his mouth. "I want to look at the critter."

Accordingly, Brennan was hauled out of his invalid chair, and literally dragged before Jackson, who quietly looked him over, between whiffs at his pipe, felt of his limbs, and then said:

"Played out. If we keep him here after the girls swings, he will be a burden on this glorious community. I am in favor, at all times, of abating public nuisances, as you all know. There's no more moral city in the United States, since I was made sheriff, and as Durango is, to-day, let her always be. String him up boys, and may ye all hereby learn a lesson."

CHAPTER III.

THE LYNCHING OF BRENNAN.

A RUSH was then made toward the tail end of the rope, which was seized by many willing hands.

Brennan spoke not a word. His pain-stricken face was nearly as white as his hair. He did not even tremble any longer.

"Ready!" cried Jackson. "Up with the old cadaver!"

Just then a shot was heard and a bullet came whizzing along, passing unpleasantly near to Van Alstine's ear.

The gang hesitated.

"Go on!" roared Jackson. "Up with him! Fasten him and then, scatter!"

The order was quickly obeyed, and then, like coyotes of the prairies, the ruffians turned and fled.

At this juncture a party of three—two men and Calamity—on horseback, dashed out of the timber, direct for the tree, and poor Brennan was soon relieved of the rope and laid upon the ground.

He was not dead, nor, indeed, seriously injured, but there were slight hopes of his rallying from the shock, owing to his paralytic condition and feebleness.

He looked up at the rescuers, whom he recognized.

"You should have let them finished the job and have done with it!" he said. "I'm not going to survive this, and have a few

words to say to you two men. Brandon, you first."

Brandon knelt and heard the whispered confession, if such it was.

The dying man then motioned to the stranger of the party, who was none other than our old-time friend, Deadwood Dick, Junior.

To him he confided his dying message, and, in a few minutes, ceased to breathe.

Calamity stood over her father, too deeply affected for awhile for speech; then she spoke.

"You may say that this is the end, but it is not. I'll make Durango howl for this brutal act!"

"Good for you!" cried Ned.

"And I can't blame you," added Dick.

"Take the body into the house and lay it upon the sofa," the girl ordered.

This was done.

The dead body was laid upon the sofa and covered up with a sheet.

Then Calamity continued:

"You can go now. I shall remain here a while. But before you go, I want to know one thing."

"What is it?" both Brandon and Dick asked, in a breath.

"What secret did papa whisper in your ears before he died?"

"That we are bound not to reveal for the present," replied Brandon, "but you shall know all in good time. Just now it must remain a mystery to you."

"Very strange," replied Calamity, "that you should withhold my father's dying words from me."

"We are very sorry," said Deadwood Dick, "but it is essential that we should do so for the present."

"Why so?"

"We cannot tell you, more than that a certain matter has to be looked into."

"When will I know?"

"In a few days, possibly."

"Very well. You can go."

"But are you not afraid to remain all alone in this house?"

"Certainly not. The dead are past harming any one."

"But the Vigilantes may return."

"Let them! They won't find me, if they do. Now, go!"

Dick and Brandon passed from the shanty, leaving the girl sport alone with her dead.

She was heard to close and bar the door after them, so the two mounted their horses and rode back into Durango.

"She's a queer character," Dick observed on the way.

"Somewhat out of the ordinary run, but withal, a lady," declared Brandon. "What do you think about what old man Brennan told us—for I suppose it was the same?"

"I don't know what to think," Dick replied.

"I wish he had confided the secret to me, alone," declared Brandon, grimly.

"Why so?"

"Because I am afraid— Well, I would rather you had not known it," and the young man relapsed into a gloomy silence.

In the short time in which he had known him, Deadwood Dick had formed two impressions of Edward Brandon.

The first impression was favorable, but the second was not.

And, as to Calamity Jane, Junior, the detective was not satisfied in regard to her, by any means. Sometimes he believed her to be the horse and cattle-thief; then, again, he could hardly bring himself to think that one so lovely would engage in such a lawless pursuit.

CHAPTER IV.

DICK MAKES SOME INQUIRIES.

IT was approaching morning, when Dick and Brandon reached the Durango House, which adjoins the White Elephant Saloon, on Hill street.

Here Brandon bade the detective good-by, and set forth for his own lodgings, further up the street.

Dick had his horse put away, got a luncheon at a restaurant, and then entered the hotel, and went to bed.

He had been in the saddle for nearly twenty-four hours, and naturally felt the need of what one doesn't often get in Durango—rest.

"It is a town that never sleeps," said a recent visitor, and he was correct.

About one-half of the population appear to be up, night and day.

The saloons, the gaming palaces, the dives and dance-halls never close.

Dick slept into the next day—it must have been high noon ere he arose, and went downstairs.

Durango in daylight is not so lively as at night, but withal is full of life and activity.

Herders were driving in stock for shipment, on the railway—merchants were busy plying their trades and the whistle's shriek and hissing noise of the steam exhaust from many engines made a sure sign of activity and prosperity.

After a hearty dinner, Dick left the Durango House, and sauntered into the White Elephant, which, with its big floor surface, its well equipped bar, gaming tables, and gilded ornamentations, ranks equal to any in the West.

A big fat German was hammering some Strauss out of a piano that had done enough service to deserve a pension.

The detective sat down at one of the tables and ordered a cigar, and picking up a local paper, glanced it over.

There was a full account of the lynching of Brennan, and the article ended by stating that, although a second attack had been made on the shanty, Calamity could not be found.

The paper also had this:

"While public opinion is against her very strong, there is not the slightest proof that she is in league with the thieves. Therefore our citizens should have a little more care and discretion in dealing with a case like this. It is a matter of life or death, and if captured, the girl deserves at least a fair trial."

"So she does," muttered Dick, "and she sha'n't get her neck stretched if I can help it. I only intended to stay here a day, but, I'm blamed if I don't see this thing out if it takes me a year."

Dick had been seated but a few minutes, when an old miner came along, and sat down at the same table. He was white-haired, and roughly but cleanly dressed."

The most disreputable thing about him was the stub of an old clay-pipe which he was smoking.

He took a few whiffs at this, and then looked at Dick.

"Stranger in town?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Hear about the lynchin' of old Brennan last night?"

"Yes, I witnessed it, at a distance."

"Thet were an alfire dirty shame, by gosh! Brennan was a good man, and a cripple to boot. Jim Jackson and thet gang o' cut-throats orter be burned at the stake, and I'd like to witness the ceremony."

"You knew Brennan, then?"

"Well, I reckon. I used to work for him on Sandy Creek sixteen years ago, when times were booming."

"Had he his daughter with him then?"

"No. I never know'd as how he had one, until he all of a sudden turned up here."

"What do you think 'bout the girl's being a horse-thief?"

"It's outrageous! Why, she wouldn't steal a pin, Calamity wouldn't."

"Some people who would despise to steal a pin would not hesitate to rob a bank, however, if a favorable opportunity offered."

"Mebbe so. But the girl is honest."

Dick changed the subject.

"Do you reside here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you know a man named Wesley Wyndham?"

"Waal, I reckon."

"Who and what is he?"

"As to who he is, more'n that he sails under the name of Wyndham, nobody knows. He's got a big cattle-ranch down Bear Creek, owns an interest in several mines hereabouts, and a town house here in Durango."

"Quite a gun, eh?"

"A son-of-a-gun."

"He is not popular, then?"

"Not much he ain't!"

"Has he any children?"

"One."

"Girl or boy?"

"Boy—or ruther, a young man. There he is now," and the miner pointed to a dark-faced young man, who stood leaning against the bar, engaged in picking his pearly teeth.

Walt Wyndham was of about Dick's own age, and of his build, and but for his raven-black eyes, hair and mustache, and dusky complexion, he would have been a handsome man.

The old man added:

"When you see ther son you see the father. Walt and his dad are as alike as two peas, 'cept that ther' is a difference in their ages, of course. The qu'arest thing about the Wyndhams is that they never speak to each other."

"No?"

"No. Walt has a room in his father's house, and eats at the same table, but they do not speak."

"That is singular."

"Mighty singular. Walt makes his living at the faro and poker-tables, and is often brought in contact with his dad. But no one has ever known them to exchange so much as a word."

"Very strange, indeed."

"Waal, yes; I should say so."

The miner arose to go.

"Sit down," said Dick. "Won't you have something to drink?"

"Waal, I don't know but what I will," the miner replied, returning to his seat. "I don't often drink, but when I do, it's about this time o' day. I'll have a little whisky for mine."

The drinks were ordered and dispatched. Then, Deadwood Dick observed:

"I should like to know more concerning these Wyndhams. I presume you can give me some points."

"Waal, I dunno. I know precious little about 'em more'n I've told you. What do you want to know?"

"Wyndham has no wife, I take it?"

"None that I know of. He hasn't any here in Durango, at any rate."

"No daughter you say?"

"No."

"Who does the housework?"

"A servant, when they have one. Sometimes they have one and sometimes they haven't. When they haven't, I opine the housework does itself."

"Servants don't stay very long, eh?"

"No, they don't appear to."

"Have they got one, now?"

"Yes."

"A man or woman?"

"A man—a pig-tail, named Lung Sing. He used to keep a laundry, but gave that up, to go to work for Wyndham."

"Humph! he must get pretty good wages, then?"

"I shouldn't wonder, for his laundry was doing a rattling business. He wouldn't be apt to give it up unless he is getting a good thing of Wyndham."

"No, it don't look that way. A Chinaman is about as close-fisted as a Jew. By the way, do you remember of a girl coming to work for Wyndham, about two months

ago—a pretty-faced, but poorly-clad girl, of seventeen or eighteen years?"

"Right well. Her name was Ethel Bly."

"That's the one."

"Yes, I remember her. I was workin' for Wyndham at the time, fixin' up his garden, and one day she brought me out a bowl of milk to drink. She was a darnation fine little lady, you bet—dratted sight too much so to work for old Wyndham."

"What became of her?"

"I dunno. I've been sort of curious about it myself."

"Why so?"

"Cause I didn't see her go. I was workin' about the premises from daylight till dark, and I didn't see her leave. Then, there's another coincidence that set me to thinking."

"What was that?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Just h'ist some more old whisky this way, bartender. My machinery needs more ile."

Drinks were produced, and the miner, who gave his name as Scott, proceeded with his story.

CHAPTER V.

A SHOT IN THE BACK.

"You see," began Scott, "the Wyndhams were seldom home, except at meal time, and there wasn't much for a housekeeper to do. So when she got her chores done, Ethel used to come out, and watch me work."

"She was a cheery young creature, innocent of guile or affection, and she told me of her humble home in Denver, and of her invalid mother, and lots else besides."

"One day she said: 'To-morrow is the drawing, I hope I'm lucky.'"

"What drawing?" I asked her.

"The Louisiana lottery. I have a ticket!" she replied.

"I laughed at her, as a matter of course. I had known so many to sink their money in that concern, that I could not do otherwise than laugh."

"Your ticket ain't worth a blade of grass, my child," I said. "You've simply thrown your money away."

"Mr. Wyndham says I may draw something," she said, "and if do he will help me to collect it. Oh! if I only could draw a fortune, just for mamma's sake."

"That is the last I had a chance to speak to her, for several days, although I could see her flitting about the kitchen. Every evening at sunset, she used to steal out, and hurry down to the post-office, to see if there was any mail for her."

"I used to pity her, when I'd see her returning with a look of disappointment on her face, and I felt for her as much as if she were my own child."

Here the old man paused, to wipe a tear from his eye.

"Scott, you have got a good heart in you," Dick observed, "and I am glad to have met you. But go on with your story."

"Well," pursued Scott, "one evening I saw her come hurrying toward the house, her face lit up as glorious as the sunset, and her eyes sparkling like diamonds."

"I've got it! I've got it!" she cried, flourishing a slip of paper, or rather a sheet of paper in the air, as she approached where I was working.

"Got what?" I demanded, although I knew there must be something up, to make her so excited.

"My fortune!" she cried. "My ticket, number 10240, has won ten thousand dollars. See! here is the list of winners, and my number is among them!"

"I took the list and examined it. True enough the number 10240 was down as having drawn ten thousand dollars."

"You are in luck," I said, "and I am glad of it. But, where is your ticket?"

"Oh! that is put away in a safe place," and she danced away.

Here the old man stopped, to refill his pipe.

"Well, what came of it?" Dick asked, a trifle impatiently.

"That's what I do not know. I never saw Ethel Bly after she entered the house that evening."

"Ah! foul play, I'll wager," declared Dick.

"I've had my suspicions that way," replied Scott, with a sage nod of the head.

"I worked in the front grounds for Wyndham, for a week after that, but no Ethel left them during daylight hours, and I'll swear to it."

"Who was the successor of Ethel as Wyndham's housekeeper?"

"A big fat nigger wench, named Hannah. She came the next morning after Ethel's disappearance."

"How long did she stay?"

"Only a week."

"Who came next?"

"A Frenchwoman, but she didn't stay long. A German woman tried it next, but she didn't stand it any longer than the rest. Finally, Wyndham caught onto the Chinaman, and he appears to stick."

"Do you know where either the wench, or the other two women live?"

"Neither the French or German woman belonged in Durango, and have gone away. Old Hannah, the wench, lives over on the back side of the town in an old hut."

"Could you guide me to the place?"

"Well, I reckon. I'm not doing anything at present, and am open-for'most any sort of a job."

"Very well. I am not ready to go yet, but you be around here and I will find you when I want you. I must have time for reflection. I have got hold of an important case, or, more properly speaking, two of them, and I reckon I've got a full hand, on a pair."

"You are a detective, I allow?" queried Scott.

"Yes."

Dick relapsed into silence, and Scott sauntered away.

Walt Wyndham had keenly watched the two men during their conversation, although he could not overhear a word that was uttered.

When Scott had gone, Wyndham walked over to where Dick was seated.

"Can I have a few words of conversation with you?" he asked.

His voice did not have the most agreeable ring.

"You will have to excuse me for the present," Dick returned, "as I am preoccupied with plans of a business nature. Some other time will do as well, I dare say."

Wyndham made no reply, but turned haughtily away, evidently not liking the refusal.

"I wonder what he could have wanted of me?" Dick mused, gazing after the young man. "Can he be concerned in the plot, if a plot there is? More than likely. There is something wicked in that dark face, if I am not mistaken. Well, Mr. Walt Wyndham, it won't do any harm to be on my guard against you, anyhow."

It was now mid-afternoon, the sun was shining warmly and the sky was of an azure blue. The air was mild but invigorating.

"It is one of Nature's happy days," Dick said to himself. "I think I'll take a gallop, and see if I can't get my wits about me."

So he ordered his horse, and mounting, set forth.

He attracted considerable attention as he rode through the town. Few men had his cool and fearless grace in the saddle. He seemed born to it.

Taking the Leadville trail to the north, he rode along through some of the most picturesque scenery the eye of an artist could crave for.

Huge mountains to the right, rugged but grassy slopes to the left; over all, the golden sunlight was gently streaming. There was a dreamy haze upon the eastern horizon; a breath of perfumed air drifted down the mountain-side; an eagle soared out from its aerial nest, and seemed to make straight for a white-capped cloud that was sailing across the heavens.

Far away down the slope herds of cattle were grazing—Wyndham's, Dick presumed, since he was the biggest cattle-raiser in the region.

In vain did the detective endeavor to get his thoughts concentrated on the work before him, so when less than two miles from town he dismounted, turned his horse loose to graze, and threw himself upon the grass, and lay there, pondering, for several hours.

"One Ethel Bly, of Denver," he mused, "invested five dollars in a lottery. Circumstances forced her to come here to work for old Wyndham. The ticket 10240 drew ten thousand dollars. Ethel disappeared immediately after the news of her luck arrived.

"So far so good. Wyndham was to assist her in cashing the prize. If I am not mistaken, he has assisted in her disappearance, but pocketed the whole boodle, for the ticket was cashed to his order in New Orleans."

"Then you can bet he's got the boodle, sure as fate."

Dick looked around with a start.

Just behind him stood no less a personage than Calamity Jane, Junior.

"You here!" Dick ejaculated.

"Well, yes, I sorter appear to be," was the reply. "I heard you mumbling to yourself, so I thought I'd float down and see what you was up to anyhow. Are you rehearsing a Shakespearian drama, or practicing for the grand opera, may I ask?"

"Well, neither," replied Dick. "I am not particularly theatrically inclined. But, what are *you* doing here?"

"Slylarking, as usual, and laying for a corpse!"

"A corpse?" echoed Dick.

"Yes, or rather for a chance to make one," was the reply.

"Ah! I see. You are on the war-path, eh?"

"Yes, I *am*!" exclaimed Calamity, grimly, as she seated herself on the grass near the sport detective. "I've taken my oath to kill every man who had anytnig to do with the lynching of my father. I know them all, and have got them marked. It may take me some little time to fetch them all, but, one by one I shall gather them in."

"Look out that you do not get gathered in first," warned Richard. "If you fall into the power of the Vigilantes now, they will make short work of you."

Calamity laughed.

"They haven't got me yet, nor are they likely to. Be I cattle queen or cattle-thief? I'm ten per cent. too fly for any of the common herd that hangs out around Durango, and don't you forget it!"

"I believe you there," Dick had to admit.

"How is the feeling toward me in the town?"

Dick was about to reply, when the report of a rifle rung out sharp and clear.

Dick immediately put his hand to his back.

"I'm shot!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

CHAPTER VI.

BRANDON SHOWS HIS TEETH.

DICK's announcement that he was shot, caused Calamity to spring to her feet.

The shot evidently came from the belt of woodland, directly back of where they were sitting.

Dick was on his feet nearly as quick as she was,

"It's nothing serious, I think," he declared. "The bullet only grazed the fleshy portion of my side!"

"I'd like to know who fired that shot!"

said Calamity. "I'd very quick fix him, so that he wouldn't fire another."

"I reckon I can guess!"

"Who?"

"Your lover."

Calamity laughed heartily.

"My lover!" she echoed. "Why, I don't own such an article."

"Oh yes you do, and his name is Ned Brandon."

"Well, if *he* is my lover, it's the first I knew of it. What put such an idea into your head?"

"Because he has so told me, and has likewise warned me to keep away from you."

"Well, I must say he has got lots of assurance. Because I picked him up, a tramp, and gave him a lift in the world, I suppose he thinks he owns me."

"He has given me plainly to understand that he is going to marry you, and he don't propose to permit any outside interference!" replied Dick, with a laugh.

"It takes two to make a bargain like that," remarked Calamity. "Wait 'till I see my gentle chappie, and I will endeavor to convince him that he has made a mistake. Let's make a search in the timber."

Which they did, and a thorough search it was, but they failed to discover the person who fired the shot.

Just as they were leaving the wood, Calamity stopped short, and gazed down at the ground—at a spot where there was no grass, and the soil was damp.

Here was a footprint—that of a man's boot, with large round-headed nails in the bottom of it.

"Humph!" she said, "I reckon I recognize that track!"

"Whose is it?"

"Ned Brandon's. It was indeed he who shot at you, as you suspected."

"I was right, then?"

"Yes. I bought the boots for Brandon, and saw him drive the tacks into the soles and heels. He has been here, and that, too, recently, for that footprint is newly made."

"It looks so. Failing to kill me with the first shot, he probably took to his heels and skipped."

"That's about the size of it. The cowardly scoundrel! I never suspected him of being such a villain as this, or I never would have done what I have for him. Just wait till I get hold of him, and I'll make him think the Fourth of July is Christmas."

"Yes, and wait till I get hold of him," Dick added, grimly. "I'll make him think worse than that. I reckon I'll meander back to Durango now, where I have some business to attend to."

"Well, so long. Good luck to you. If any of the Durango devils try to impose on you, why, knock 'em on the head—and I reckon you're the sport who can do it. And if any one inquires after the state of my health, tell 'em I'm lovely, and flourishing like a sunflower."

"All right; I will. I suppose I will see you again?"

"Yes, and probably when least expected."

They separated, Dick mounting his horse, and riding away toward Durango.

Calamity, however, did not immediately leave the vicinity, but threw herself on the grass, in a half-reclining position, and gazed down into the valley, where the herds were peacefully grazing.

"What strange fatality has thrown me in contact with this stranger?" she murmured, "and what will be the result? He is a detective and I am an outlaw. Before he came, Ned Brandon looked fair to my gaze, but he pales into insignificance compared with this dashing stranger."

"Then, too, Brandon's cowardly act forever sets me against him!"

"It does, hey?"

And lo and behold, Ned Brandon stepped before her!

In one hand he carried a rifle.

"Yes, it does," cried Calamity, not moving. "You have forfeited all respect I ever had for you, by your cowardly act!"

"What act?"

"Attempting to shoot Deadwood Dick, when his back was turned to you."

"You surprise me!"

"Oh, do I?"

"Yes; I have not shot at him, or at any one or at anything, to-day."

"You lie!" cried Calamity. "It was you who shot at Deadwood Dick. You need not deny it, for I *know* it. You need not be jealous of him, either, for you are nothing to me! Nor more is he. Don't think because when you came here, a tramp, and I helped you out, that I'm in love with you for I am *not*! You had the nerve to tell Deadwood Dick that you were going to marry me. Before you do, I reckon I will have something to say about that!"

"Calamity, you do me great injustice. You know I love you truly, and would be your very slave, to possess you. I have come here to lay my heart at your feet—"

"Don't!" replied the strange woman, "for my feet are sore now!"

"Ah! you ridicule my affections, do you? Well, so be it! You will regret it when too late. You have enemies enough now. I shouldn't think you would want to make any more."

"A fig for my enemies!" replied the girl. "Who are they? Nothing but a lot of ruffians. I'll clean the whole of them out before I'm through with them, and don't you forget it."

And rising, she walked away.

Brandon made no attempt to follow her.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCOILING THE ROPE THAT WAS TO HANG WYNDHAM.

THE residence of Wesley Wyndham was one of the handsomest in Durango.

It was built of stone, in modern style, and had several "L's" and wings.

It backed square up against a towering bluff, which overlooked it, and it commanded an uninterrupted view of the town.

A spacious lawn sloped down in front, and there were garden patches on either side.

Within, the hand of good workmanship was visible everywhere.

The woodwork, the painting and the papering all reflected good taste.

The carpets were of the best quality, and the furniture of the newest designs.

In fact, it was like the home of a man of liberal means.

Rare pictures, costly *bric-a-brac*, elegant rugs—everything that a person could wish for was here.

It was night. Wyndham sat in his easy-chair before the fire in the parlor. A roaring fire blazed in the fireplace, so no lamp had been lit.

Walt Wyndham his son lay upon the sofa stretched out at full length reading a novel.

Not a word passed between father and son.

A strange pair were they, surely.

The door opened, and the Chinaman brought in a glass of wine to the elder Wyndham.

"You can bring me in a drink, too, John," said Walt Wyndham, "only make mine a bottle. I'm out of sorts, to-night."

For the first time, maybe, in a year or years, the elder Wyndham spoke up.

"Were you ever *in* sorts?" he demanded, growlingly.

"Well, I don't distinctly remember," the young man replied, with a yawn. "Possibly not, as it does not run in the breed."

"How is it you are home to-night?"

"That's a silly question for you to ask!"

"Why so?"

"Because you know I never trouble you with my presence when I've got money."

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enough to buy a stack of chips. I'm waiting for you to produce."

"Got roped in again, eh?"

"You bet—cleaned out slick as a whistle, and a good deal slicker!"

"Serves you right."

"Now, that is consoling of you, by Jove! But, I say, governor, ain't it about time for you to produce? It's about time the games were opening up, and I don't want to lose my chair."

"To the devil with your chair," growled the elder. "I'm getting tired of this constant demand for money!"

"I know it is rather hard," replied Walt, "but everything considered, I think you are getting off mighty cheap!"

"Oh! you do, eh?"

"Certainly. It's lucky for you you have so lenient a person as your son to deal with. An old reprobate, like you, can well afford to disgorge a dollar or two, now and then, in order to have his secrets kept, and a son's protection."

Wesley Wyndham made no reply, just then, for Lung Sing entered with Walter's wine, and placed it upon a stand beside him. The young gambler disdained the use of a glass, for, it being only a pint bottle of sherry, he gulped down the contents, without stopping.

When he had finished, and sunk back upon the couch, the elder Windham demanded:

"How much money do you want? I would be alone, to-night, for I have a great deal to think of."

"Yes, I should think you would have," replied the dutiful son, with a yawn. "Well, I am going to break the bank to-night and it will take about two hundred dollars to do it with. Give me say, two-fifty."

"I'll give you a hundred, and not a penny more," declared the elder Wyndham, and, going to his safe, he opened it, took out some money, and returned.

"Here's your money," he said. "Take it, and begone!"

"All right, my noble sire! I am deeply indebted to you. I'll go and buy a stack of chips, put them on the king, and if I win, I'll come home and curl your hair, while you dream over the sad, sad past, and your bad, bad deeds. See you later, when I'm broke. Ta! ta!"

And Walter left the room.

"Curse that boy!" the father hissed. "Now that he has got the bulge on me, he is pushing me to the ground. He knows I dare not refuse him, for if I did, he would give me dead away. I could well wish him six feet under the ground. My only hold is to fee him, until I can see an opportunity to shake him off my hands. Then I'll do it!"

Just then Lung Sing came like a shadow into the room.

"'Merican man want to see you!" he said with a grin.

"'Merican gentleman, you idiot! Do you suppose niggers or you heathen come to visit me?"

"Chinee man much better 'Merican man," retorted the servant.

"Well, go show the man in."

Lung Sing vanished, to return soon, escorting into the presence of Wesley Wyndham Deadwood Dick, Junior.

"Mr. Wyndham, I presume," Dick queried, helping himself to a seat.

"I am," was the reply. "Who are you, may I ask?"

"My name is Bristol."

"I do not know you!"

"Very likely, as I have only lately arrived here."

"What is your business with me?"

"I came to inquire about a friend of mine."

"Yes? Well, what have I to do with it?"

"She was employed by you as a domestic."

"Her name?"

"Ethel Bly!"
Wyndham started.

"What are you to her?" Wyndham demanded.

"That is my business," was the retort. "The girl came here to work, and has not been seen or heard from since. I would like to know where she is."

"You will have to ask some one who knows!" replied Wyndham, haughtily. "She didn't suit me, and I discharged her."

"Yet, you drew ten thousand dollars for her, from New Orleans, and she disappeared immediately afterward. Where did she go to, with all this big sum of real money?"

"Don't ask me. It was paid to her and she disappeared."

"She never left this house!"

"You lie, you hound!"

"You are the hound who lies!" replied Dick. "Now, look here, Wyndham: give me that girl and her money, or I am going to make you trouble. I am an officer, and fully qualified to carry out all I promise. Your record here is not an unblemished one, so you had better let loose of bull's horns, and say, 'I give in.' Don't you think so?"

"I give in to nothing!" snarled Wyndham. "The last I saw of Ethel Bly was when she left my house, with her fortune in her pocket. Knowing the ticket to be good, I advanced her the money on it, and she at once returned to Denver."

"That will do to tell those who will believe it! which I do not."

"What difference is it to you, whether she went to Denver or to Halifax?"

"A difference of ten thousand dollars. I am going to find that girl, or lock you up."

Wyndham laughed, and a disagreeable laugh it was, too.

"Lock me up!" he ejaculated. "Why, my son, I own half of this town! You're barking up the wrong tree when you think to intimidate me. About the likeliest thing you can do is to make tracks toward the rising sun."

"Not yet!" demurred Dick. "I reckon I'm good here, for a short time longer—at least until I find Ethel Bly and her fortune. You had better own up, Wyndham, and make a clean breast of it. There's no use of your trying to dodge around the bush! But, have your way to-night. I'll see you later. Ta-ta!" and the detective, now satisfied in his own mind, that Ethel Bly had either been put out of the way or was a prisoner in Wyndham's house, returned to his room and went to bed.

He arose at an early hour, and went down to the office, where he met Scott.

"Just the man I've been lookin' for," the miner announced.

"Why so?" Dick asked.

"Well, I ruther took a fancy to you yesterday, and sez I: 'If I can do him a good turn, I will.' So I dropped around and paid old Hannah a call."

"Yes? Well, what did you learn?"

"Not much, but she knows something about Ethel."

"Think so?"

"I know it. But she is a sly old fox, and it takes money to loosen her tongue. She would tell me nothing, but intimated that if you were to come around with some boodle, she would talk."

"Then she won't talk without money, eh?"

"No. She has a pretty hard row to hoe to make a living, and one can't blame her if she does want to make a dollar."

"Well, there is something in that, to be sure," Dick admitted. "I will go and see her after awhile. I doubt if she can give me much information."

"I am sure she can."

"Well, all right. We will try her after awhile."

"Have you heard of the new sensation?" asked Scott.

"No. I am just out of bed."

"Why, Calamity has placarded the town, announcing that she will be the death of every man who had anything to do with the lynching of her father. She's a tigress when she's off, and I reckon some of the boys will bite the dust shortly."

"No doubt of it. She is a plucky girl, and what she says goes. She told me she would lay for vengeance, and I reckon she will keep her word. By the way, have you seen Ned Brandon around this morning?"

"No, I haven't seen him since yesterday." The two had breakfast together, and then started for Hannah's hut, which was on the northern outskirts of the town.

It was a rickety old shanty, which might have been the first built in Durango.

Hannah sat in front of the door, peeling some potatoes, when Dick and Scott arrived.

"Hello, Han! I see you still eat!" Scott cried.

"Deed, I does, when there's anything to eat. When there ain't I goes without like odder folks."

"Well, Hannah, here's the gent I was telling you about. You open your mouth now, and tell what you know, and he will make it worth your while."

Hannah surveyed Dick critically.

She was big and fat, black as the ace of spades.

She had a sharp eye, however, and a thoroughly business look.

"Well, what d'ye want?" she demanded.

"I want to know what you know about Wyndham's house, and Ethel Bly," responded Dick. "Here's a ten-dollar note to loosen your tongue."

The negress seized the note greedily.

"Dat's de fu'st ten dollars I've seen in a dog's age," she confessed. "When my old man was alive, we used to scrape up one occasionally, but that am a good while ago."

"Never mind your old man," replied Dick. "He's nothing to do with the case whatever."

"What case, sah?"

"That of Ethel Bly."

"Dat was de young woman who worked for Wyndham ahead of me?"

"The same. What did you learn concerning her, while you were in Wyndham's employ?"

"Nothing."

"Don't lie to me!"

"Sure, not. I nebber tells nuffin' but de truth."

"Did you have access to all of the rooms of the house?"

"No, sah, I didn't. The only part ob de house dat dey would let me in was Mr. Walter's room, and old Wyndham's—dat is 'ceptin' de lower floor where I had full sway."

"Why did you leave Wyndham's?"

"'Cause I got de sack. He said I was nosin' around too much. So I packed up my kit and left."

"Did you observe anything that struck you as being singular, while you were there?"

"Well, yes, I reckons I did."

"What?"

"Well, de only ones in de house to serve meals for, was old Wyndham and his son, 'ceptin' me, yet I had to cook meals for three. De third meal old Wyndham took charge of!"

"That settles it," Dick said, turning to Scott. "Ethel Bly is a prisoner in Wyndham's house."

"I reckon you are right!"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"We must gain access to the house and search it."

"Rather dangerous."

"Why so? The Wyndhams are not at home in the daytime."

"There is no certainty about that. They are liable to be home at any time," said Scott.

"I don't think there is much fear of their being home, now," opined Dick. "Do you know the Chinese servant?"

"I've seen him. I'm not fond of the galoots, so I never made his acquaintance."

"Well, come along. I'll go through that place if it costs me a fight. I am well satisfied that Ethel Bly never left that house after she received the report from the lottery. I am furthermore satisfied that Wyndham appropriated her fortune, and if he has not killed her, outright, that he has shut her up until he can get rid of her secretly."

"Well, I am with you," declared Scott. "I rather kitten to you, for you seem to be a purty square sort of a feller. I'd like to find out what's become of the gal, as well as you. But, it is purty early yet. Wyndham is not an early riser. Hadn't we better go back into town, and wait till a little later?"

"Maybe you are right," Dick assented.

"We will go back and wait awhile."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VAIN SEARCH.

So they left old Hannah's, and walked back into town—Dick proceeding to his room, where he sat and pondered, for some time. Then he was aroused by a rap at the door.

Dick arose and opened it.

"Mr. Walter Wyndham wants to know if he can see you, sir," said a servant.

"Show him up!" replied Dick.

"I wonder what the scalawag wants of me," he mused. "If he wants a fuss I will give him all the chance he can wish—with a little to spare!"

Young Wyndham entered.

The dark, sullen look was on his face, and he had the same haughty bearing as when the detective first saw him.

"I presume you are somewhat puzzled, at my call?" he remarked, "considering that we are strangers."

"It would be but natural that I should be," Dick replied.

Wyndham helped himself to a seat.

"I'm an abrupt sort of a fellow," he went on—"perhaps too much so. I would like to know what brought you to Durango?"

"A horse," replied Dick.

"I mean what was your object in coming here?"

"I came here in search of a young lady, who was in your father's employ, as a domestic."

"Have you found her?"

"No."

"Well, you find her, and I will give you a hundred dollars."

"You will?"

"I will."

"Are you interested in the girl, so particularly?"

"Yes. It was a case of love at first sight. The affection was mutual, and honorable."

"Well," assumed the detective, "it seems to me you ought to know something about what became of her."

"But I don't. She disappeared immediately after she got the news of her luck in the lottery."

"Your father had the ticket?"

"Yes, he got it cashed, I reckon, and put the money in his own pocket."

"That's my idea."

"The old man is a rascal, if I do have to say it, and is liable to do almost anything."

"Do you think he has got Ethel locked up?"

"Not in the house, for I have searched that high and low. It beats me where she can be. You are a detective?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Now, you go to work and find Ethel, and I will be your friend for

life. I will give you any assistance in my power, and pay you well besides."

"To find the girl is what I'm here for," Dick admitted. "I shall try to find her. I take it for granted that you and your father are not on the best of terms."

"Well, no!" Walt replied, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Where is the old man now?"

"I don't know. If he has left the house, I reckon he is around the town somewhere."

"Go and take a little skirmish," suggested Dick, "and see if you can locate him. If he is not at home, I want to examine the house."

"You will find nothing."

"That may be, but, again, it may not be. I may find a clew where you would least expect one."

"All right. I will go and see!" and Walt left the room.

"I was somewhat mistaken in that fellow," muttered Dick. "He pans out better than I had any idea he would. Maybe he will prove a useful accessory after all."

It was nearly an hour ere Walter returned.

"It is all right!" he announced. "The old man has gone out to the mines, and won't be back for a number of hours, as he has to pay off the men to-day; so now is your chance to go through the house."

"Then let us go," urged Dick. "There will be no trouble with the Chinese servant?"

"Not the least. He and I stand on pretty good terms."

They at once set forth for the Wyndham residence.

"I don't think you will find much out of this," said Walt.

"If Ethel Bly is about the premises I am going to find her."

"But, man, I know she is not in the house!"

"Maybe not. Perhaps she is in the cellar?"

"No she ain't in the cellar. I've given the whole premises a good search, and found not the slightest trace of her. She has vanished completely."

Walter had a pass-key and was therefore able to gain admission without ringing up the servant.

They entered, and Walter guided the detective all through it, from top to bottom, but, no clew to the whereabouts of Ethel Bly was obtained. The room she had occupied was vacant, the bed neatly made.

"Did she have any luggage, when she came here?" Dick asked.

"I think no trunk," replied Walt. "She was evidently pretty hard up. The old man wouldn't have taken her only that he got her cheap."

"You seem to have no high opinion of his good qualities."

"Just so. We have been enemies, strange to say, since I was a youth, for he has not one lovable quality."

"Enemies? That is singular. How did that break occur?"

"I was my mother's boy and for that he seemed to dislike and mistrust me, so I resented his usage and always shall."

"Let's take a look into the cellar," Dick now further suggested.

"You won't find anything there," Walter assured; but to the cellar they went, and Lung Sing, now on hand, followed with a lamp.

The cellar was a large one, covering the space of the whole floor area.

There was nothing in it in particular, except a few barrels and boxes that had been there for some time.

"Well, I don't see that there is anything to be gained here," Dick conceded.

"I told you so," replied Walt. "Whatever has become of Ethel, she certainly is not around these premises."

"I don't and won't believe it!" replied

Dick. "She must be here somewhere, because she was never seen to leave the place."

"Who told you this?"

"Scott, the old miner."

"Well, he ought to know, for he was here at the time of her disappearance."

Nothing came of the search, so they went back into town, and dropped in at the White Elephant.

There was great excitement. A man named Morgan had just been brought in from the street, dead—stabbed through the heart.

He was one of those who had assisted in the lynching of old Brennan.

When found, a paper was fastened to his coat, containing the following manifesto:

"NOTICE:—This is Case Number One. The others who had a hand in the lynching of my father will follow, one by one, until they are all gathered in. Such will be the vengeance of Belle Brennan, *alias*, CALAMITY JANE, JR."

As may be imagined, this set every one in a fever of excitement.

Morgan had been one of the deputies of Jim Jackson, the sheriff, and was quite popular among the rougher element, being a clever pugilist and a successful gambler.

When in luck, he was free with his money, and all the bummers who frequented the White Elephant, were welcome to drink at his expense.

"I'll give five hundred dollars reward, out of my own pocket, for the capture of that girl!" announced Mayor Mike Murphy. "She's been a curse to our blooming community long enough."

"So say I!" cried Jim Jackson. "Here lies one of our worthy citizens, cut down in the prime of his life, with a family dependent on him for their daily bread. Now, by that power vested in me as sheriff of this county, I offer a reward of five hundred dollars more, for the capture of this bold and audacious girl."

"I reckon you had better keep your five hundred!" spoke up Deadwood Dick, "for you won't catch her. She's altogether too fly for you. I have seen her and had a talk with her, and she means business!"

"How, business?"

"Every man who had anything to do with the lynching of old Brennan, is doomed."

"Bah! Who are you, that you know so much?" demanded Jackson.

"It don't matter who I am. I am simply apprising you of the fact that, if you had anything to do with the lynching of Brennan, you had better make your will. Every man is marked."

"You'll get marked if you don't look out," Jackson thundered. "I allow it is my duty as a guardian of the peace, to demand to know what brings you to this town, anyhow?"

"That is none of your business, in the least, sir. If you have any objections to my staying here, make them manifest and I will hold them under consideration. You are a county officer, and a fine specimen. You might take a prize, providing it was not a good year for the boss pumpkin. I am a United States officer, and I propose to stay in Durango as long as I have reason to. If you'd like, examine my badge, and satisfy yourself that it is not always advisable to buck your head against a hard rock. You are liable to hurt your head."

Jackson examined the badge.

"Well, I guess that is all right," he said. "But, you were so fresh that I didn't know what to make of you. Some hard characters wander into this town, and, as a guardian of the peace, I have to be constantly on the watch for them."

"You are a healthy old guardian of the peace!" retorted Dick.

"Why not—what d'ye mean?"

"It's a nice guardian of the peace that will lynch a helpless old cripple!"

"That's none of your cursed business, me larky," snarled Jackson. "The old cuss needed all he got."

"And you will get the same dose, take my word for it," replied Dick. "You've got a girl after you now, that ain't no angel, and you can bet on it."

"You seem to take a mighty sight of interest in her!" growled Jackson.

"So I do. I think she has been outrageously imposed upon."

"You do?"
"I certainly do. You murdered her father, and I wouldn't blame her if she slaughtered every mother's son of you, and if needs be, I'd just as lieve take a hand in it, myself!"

This created a sensation.
Few men would have dared venture such a remark in the White Elephant, the scene of many a shocking tragedy; but Dick Bristol did, to the surprise of every man present.

Jim Jackson, blusterer that he was, like all such was an arrant coward, and not to Dick's surprise, the blusterer walked away as if to recuperate at some other bar.

Mayor Mike Murphy was not noted for valiant deeds, and he followed.

Without a leader, a crowd is nowhere, and so the whole gang dispersed; whereat Dick "smiled a smile" that ended in a hearty laugh.

"I wouldn't have believed it, had I not seen it!" said Walt Wyndham. "Why, a man never came to Durango before, who could bluff down a crowd like that."

"No? Why, there was no bluff about it. I meant business, and I reckon they were aware of that fact."

"Blame me if you haven't got pluck. I thought I had some, but you knock me all to pieces."

Just then Ned Brandon came rushing into the saloon, evidently in great excitement.

"Who offered a reward for Belle Brennan?" he cried. "I can lead a party to the rendezvous of herself, and her gang. Let the man with the reward step forward."

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER QUEST.

THE idea of giving up the girl was shocking—one, at any rate, that Dick could not stand.

"You accursed wretch!" he cried, "would you give up the girl you profess to love?"

"Yes! Because of you she has refused me. Now she can pay the penalty!"

"You are a cowardly cur, and a liar!" returned Dick. "You had no idea of marrying her, until you found there was some money coming to her."

"You are a liar, and a thief," retorted Brandon.

The detective's answer was one sledge-hammer blow, which dropped Brandon to the floor, from which he did not attempt to rise. He was not knocked senseless but had got enough.

Dick turned away, and went into the dining-room, where he indulged in a hearty meal; and then proceeded to the White Elephant, where he was greeted by anything but friendly glances, but that did not appear to affect him in the least.

Brandon was not present; neither was Walt Wyndham; but he found Scott there.

"Have you been to Wyndham's?" he at once asked.

"All through his house from top to bottom."

"And found not a clew?"

"Not one."

Scott scratched his head, and looked at the floor.

"She's there!" he declared. "I wouldn't be afraid to bet my life on it."

"Well, I am of the same opinion, but we were not able to find her. If she is there, she is well secreted."

"I'd like to have a look about that place myself."

"Do you think you could improve on my search?"

"I might. Two heads are better than one if one is a sheep's head, as the saying goes."

"Well, there may be something in that. But, so far as the house is concerned I will take my oath she was not in it while I was there."

"I've got an idea that maybe has not occurred to you," hinted Scott.

"What is it?"

"The house backs against the bluff. May there not be a place in this bluff, where a person could be stowed away in case of emergency?"

"Good thought!" assented the detective; "You may have struck the key-note. We must pay another visit to the house."

"Take Walter with you?"

"No. I'll dispense with him, this time. He is all right, no doubt, but we will work the Chinaman this time. Maybe we will be able to make something out of the Celestial."

"Rather doubtful, I guess, for old Wyndham probably pays him as much for his silence as for his service!"

"Well, we will try, anyhow. You drop around to a drug store, and get a quarter's worth of morphine, and I'll get a flask of whisky. He won't refuse a drink I reckon, and that will fix him."

"Dunno about that," demurred the miner. "The durned critters are so used to opium, that a drug like morphine won't have a deal of effect on him."

"Well we can but try the racket, and see how it turns out."

"All right. You're the doctor. It is your funeral, not mine."

Scott set off after the morphine and Dick procured a flask of whisky at the bar, and when Scott returned with the drug, it was put into the liquor, and well shaken.

"There! If I can get a couple of swigs of that down the heathen, I reckon he will repose until we have time to give the premises a thorough search. I feel sure that we shall have success this time."

So they started for Wyndham's house. As they neared the residence, Scott said:

"The old man may be home. I reckon I'd better go ahead and prospect."

"Not a bad idea. You know the Chinaman, and perhaps you can pave the way a bit."

So Dick waited under the shade of a tree while Scott went on his mission.

Having been in the employ of Wyndham the miner had no hesitation about entering the premises. He went around to the side door, which opened out of the kitchen. There he found Lung Sing engaged in some laundry work.

"Hello, John, how you was!" said Scott. "Still at the washee?"

"Allee time washee," replied Lung. "Have to have clean shirt evly day."

"Who does—old Wyndham?"

"Yes."

"Is he home? I want to see him."

"Not home. No one home 'cept me."

"Well, that's too bad!"

"Anything you want?"

"Well, yes. There's goin' to be an insurance put on this house, and the agent is here to inspect it. We want to have a look over the premises."

"Can't let in house, till boss comes."

"But, he may not be here until night, and we must attend to this business at once."

"No help. Boss say lettee no one in house."

"Now, look here, John, that's all bosh! Tell you what I'll do. Let us have a look over the house, and the insurance man will treat you to a bottle of whisky!"

The prospect of a flask of the amber-colored juice, looked tempting to him.

"Have a big dlink," thought he. "Boss

away. No one around. Me go on spree, allee samee 'Melican chief!"

So turning to Scott he said:

"Allee right. Where's whisky?"

"Wait and I'll fetch it," replied the miner.

He then went back and joined Dick.

"It is all right," he announced. "All you have got to do is to give the heathen the whisky, and we can gain access to the house."

So they went to the side door and Dick made Lung Sing a present of the filled flask.

"Bully, whisk," was the Celestial's welcome.

"Well, get outside of some of it, and then let's into the house," Dick ordered.

Removing the cork, Lung raised the bottle to his lips, and allowed full half the contents to run down his throat.

"Muchee good," he said. "Make Chinee feel belly happy."

"Well, then, let us into the house," said Dick. "I don't purpose to wait here all day."

"Allee right. Come."

And extracting a key from under his frock, Lung Sing led the way by unlocking the kitchen door.

He had barely got inside the house, however, when he reeled and in a few minutes was flat on his face insensible.

"Jemimy! but that took effect on him durned quick!" said Scott.

"Yes. He took a pretty big swig."

"Hain't killed him, have you?"

"No fear. He will be all right in an hour's time. It requires a powerful drug to kill one of them chaps. We will bind, and leave him here while we make the search. See if you can find some rope."

Scott made a search, and finally raked up a piece of clothes line, which answered all requirements.

Lung Sing was then securely bound, to provide against the possibility of his interference in the search.

"Now, then, we will give this house a thorough searching," Dick decided.

"There is more than one thing I want to look up while I am now again here. You knew old Brennan?"

"Yes."

"Did you know he was wealthy?"

"Well, no. But I've often had an idea that his pretended poverty was partly a sham, for they always seemed to get along as well as other folks, and without working."

"Well, Brennan left a million of dollars to his daughter, in care of this man, Wyndham, to be invested in good securities. His last words to me were to get the contract papers away from Wyndham, and make him pay over the cash. It appears that he has been holding the papers and refused to give them up unless Belle Brennan would marry him."

"Well, this is news to me."

"It was to me until the lynching affair."

"Then, let's sail ahead. If the papers are in the house we will find them, for Calamity is a good gal. I'd vote for her every day in a week, and twice on a Sunday."

"Here, too," replied Dick, heartily. "She is one of a hundred, bad as she seems to be."

The search then began in earnest.

Every room in the house was explored!

Not a nook or corner was left unexamined; but, no trace of Ethel Bly was to be found—not even any of her clothes.

"Well, I guess there ain't no use of looking for her here," Dick decided.

"It don't seem so," replied Scott. "I reckon maybe the girl got her money and slid out."

"Nonsense! She wouldn't run away. Why should she? As I have said, I feel sure Ethel Bly never left this house after she heard of her good fortune. So we must proceed on that hypothesis. I suggest that we try the cellar once more."

To the cellar they went.

There was nothing particularly strange about it, except that the walls were built of square blocks of brown stone.

"They don't quarry such stone hereabouts, do they?" the detective asked of Scott.

"I wasn't here when the house was built, but I reckon they came from some other part of the State. There's no brown-stone quarry around here."

"Rather a queer idea that Wyndham should go to the expense of importing the stone for a cellar wall, ain't it?"

"Well, I should say so. Them stone are pretty costly, eh?"

"You bet they are! The fact that these walls are brown stone increases my suspicion ten-fold."

"In what respect?"

"I believe there's a hole in the bluff back of this rear wall."

"But the wall appears to be solid."

"Yes, it looks so. But, some of these blocks may be movable."

"We can try them, at any rate."

They proceeded at once with the examination of the walls.

"I'll bet my shirt there ain't a loose stone in this wall," protested Scott, after they had examined nearly all of the rear wall stones.

"Take my advice, and hang on to your shirt, for it will be winter after awhile, and you will need one. Behold!" and Dick pointed to a pair of hinges discovered in one of the crevices between two of the stones.

But there was no appearance of a door, no keyhole, no apparent way of getting into the place beyond.

"Well, this looks as if we were in as much of a muddle as ever," said Dick.

"There's a place beyond, dead sure," insisted the old miner.

"No doubt about it. The question is how are we going to get into it."

"I reckon you won't get into it, not if I know myself!" said a gruff voice. And turning, Dick and Scott beheld no less a personage than Wesley Wyndham.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE DROP, BUT NOT INTIMIDATED.

"WELL, gentlemen," Wyndham said, "what are you doing here?"

"Trying to find Ethel Bly," was Dick's response.

"Haven't found her, have you?"

"No, not yet."

"Nor are you likely to, around my house, for she is not here."

"I don't believe it. You have got her penned up here somewhere, and I'm going to find her if it takes me a year."

"Well, you will have a good time doing it. The girl is not here I tell you."

"She left your employ after she got her money, did she?"

"She did."

"She was not seen to leave your house. Scott, here, was at work for you; and he would have seen her."

"She left at night."

"That is not likely. There is no night trains for Denver."

"Maybe she did not go there," said Wyndham. "She may have eloped."

"Pah! Whom would she elope with?"

"Oh, there are lots of young men looking out for just the chance to run away with a girl who has got more money than brains."

"Maybe so, but Ethel Bly would not be liable to run away, and leave her poor old mother dependent on her for support, in Denver."

"I don't know about that. She was a flighty creature at the best, and mighty uncertain."

"What is beyond this wall?"

"The bluff."

"There's more than that."

"Not that I know of."

"What are those hinges for, if there is nothing beyond?"

"They were put there when the house was built, as I contemplated building a wine-cellar back into the bluff, but finally gave up the idea."

"If you please, just open that secret door, and let's have a look beyond. It will satisfy us more than your word."

"There's no door there yet."

"I know better."

"Well, if you know more than I about it, suppose you get out of my house. I can't parley with you any longer. I'd be justified in blowing your brains out, as it is. I'll give you two minutes to get out, and no more, and if I ever catch you around here again, I will shoot you at sight. So take warning."

"Correct," said Dick. "You happen to have the drop now, but you will give up Ethel Bly before I leave Durango, or you will give up your life. Just put that in your pipe and smoke it, at your leisure."

"I'm not smoking that kind of tobacco," replied Wyndham.

At the muzzle of his revolver he marched Dick and Scott up-stairs, and to the front door.

"Now, you get!" he ordered, "and don't let me catch you around my premises again."

"Oh, I dare say I'll pay you another call in the course of time," Dick retorted. "I've a great curiosity to make some further explorations in that cellar of yours."

"Well, you try it, and I'll guarantee the undertaker a job."

"It will be for yourself, if any one."

"Come now, get."

"By-bye," said Dick. "I'll see you later."

With that he and Scott took their departure.

"Well, we got out of that scrape cheaper than I expected," said the latter.

"Well, yes. It's a wonder the old cuss didn't shoot."

"A big wonder."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"For one thing, that house must be kept under constant surveillance. If Wyndham has got the girl shut up there, he will now take alarm, most likely, and find another place for her."

"I shouldn't wonder if there is something in that. Having got himself into the muss, he is bound to keep himself in it," said Scott.

"Just so. He will try and get rid of the girl, as soon as he can. Therefore, I will leave you here to keep an eye on the house, and will bring you a relief for the night."

"All right; and when you come with the relief, don't forget something to brace a fellow up. I'll keep a good watch on the house. If I see a carriage go there and leave, then what shall I do?"

"Follow it."

"But, I couldn't keep up with it on foot, not very well."

"I will send a boy here with my horse."

"All right. I can follow, if there is any occasion to," Scott said.

So Dick walked on back into the town.

"To-day's adventures have not panned out as well as expected," he mused. "Now that Wyndham found us in his house, it will be hard work to get into it again. But into it I mean to go before many hours. The mystery surrounding those hinges in the cellar wall must be investigated, and I'm the investigator that is going to do it!"

CHAPTER XI.

GIVING BRANDON SOMETHING TO REMEMBER.

RETURNING to the busy part of the town Dick met Ned Brandon lounging in front of the White Elephant Saloon.

"Just the chap I want to see," the detective said, walking up to him. "You made

a cowardly attack on me, when my back was turned, with the intention of taking my life."

"I did nothing of the sort."

"You lie, you hound. And, now, we've got to have it out."

"How do you mean?"

"You have got to fight me with pistols."

"I won't fight."

"But, you will, though."

This altercation of course attracted a crowd, among whom were Mayor Mike Murphy and Jim Jackson, the sheriff.

"Hello, here! What's the difficulty?" demanded Murphy.

"This scoundrel made an attempt on my life, and now that I want to meet him the coward won't fight!"

"Is this so, Brandon?" asked Murphy.

"Yes, it is so," replied Brandon, doggedly. "I was not brought up for fighting duels, and I don't intend to begin now."

"Yet you shot me, like an assassin."

"As I had a perfect right to do. You and the girl outlaw, Belle Brennan, were together."

"And jealousy caused you to attempt to take my life."

"There was no jealousy about it. You are both of you outlaws, and I should have been doing the public a favor if the shot I fired had been fatal."

"You are both a liar and a would-be murderer, and are in duty bound to have a settlement with me, here and now. I'll leave it to the mayor if this ain't a fair and square deal!"

"Well, I should cough!" returned the mayor, who, being a blue grass Kentuckian was an authority on matters of honor. "Yas," he continued. "Brandon must toe the mark, or forever forfeit the respect of his fellow-men. Don't you say so Jackson?"

"Well, I reckon it's no more than fair," assented Jackson. "However, as a guardian of the peace, and with their moral interests of the community in view, I cannot consent to the use of revolvers. If the men will go to work with their fists, I can look on with a clear conscience."

This caused a general laugh, for those who were intimately acquainted with Jackson never knew he had a conscience.

"Well, if I must be forced into a fight so be it," said Brandon. "I'll break the head of this infernal interloper. As a pal of Bella Brennan, it stands to reason he is one of her sort, and nothing will please me more than to give him the worst licking he ever had."

"Easier said than done, I reckon," observed Mayor Mike Murphy.

"I reckon it's so," said Dick. "Step out in the street and square yourself!"

"Ten to five on Brandon!" cried one of the assemblage.

"Taken," Murphy responded. "I'm open to all such bets as that."

For the next few seconds the betting was lively, Dick being the favorite.

News of the impending battle had spread like wildfire. Nearly the whole town seemed to have turned out, in an incredibly short space of time to witness the "sport," for such it was regarded in Durango.

Men came, women assembled, some of them bringing their babies. Young America was well represented.

The ring formed, Mayor Mike Murphy mounted a box, which had been provided for a grand stand, and with a revolver in either hand delivered an address:

"Ladies and galoots!" he called out. "By the power vested in me as mayor of this town, I propose to conduct this circus, and will salivate the first son of-a-sea-cook who attempts to interfere. The programme is that these men, who are enemies, shall bammer away at each other, until one or the other gets done-up so bad that he won't be able to speak United States for a month. Now then, lads, sail in, and may the best

man win. No hittin' below the belt, nor punchin' a man when he's down. Stand up to the rack and let it go forth to the world that Durango has got a Sullivan as well as Boston."

This speech was greeted with tremendous applause. Durango, in its own estimation, was much superior to Boston.

By this time Dick and Brandon had stripped to the waist. Both were about of a size, and of equal muscular development.

At a signal from Murphy, the fight began, amid the most intense excitement.

Although Brandon had no repute as a pugilist, he handled himself cleverly, and it was soon evident that the two men were pretty evenly matched.

Brandon drew the first blood, on Dick's nose, amid terrific applause.

"My man, for a thousand!" yelled Wesley Wyndham, who had joined the throng.

"Taken!" shouted Murphy, who was Dick's ready backer.

This first blood seemed to suddenly arouse the redoubtable Richard, and with one crashing blow, he caught Brandon in under the jaw and toppled him over.

Brandon was not knocked out, however, and was quickly on foot again. Then for the next ten minutes there was some fearful fighting.

Wesley Wyndham was in his element.

He was flourishing his money around, and offering to give odds on Brandon.

Murphy had taken him up, to the extent of several hundred dollars, and Jim Jackson covered as much more of the mine-owner's money.

The excitement grew momentarily more and more intense.

Brandon was gradually becoming the favorite.

Deadwood Dick, in his adventurous career, had been in many contests; but, had never yet met a man who could stand before him as long as Brandon.

But, Dick finished him at last, when with one awful blow, he leveled his adversary, and Brandon lay where he dropped.

He was completely knocked out.

"I reckon that settles it," cried Murphy, in high spirits. "So now gents, gents, walk up, and pay up. The circus is over, the clown is down in the ring and the only one to be paid off is the ringmaster. That's me. So walk up, boys, and pay your debts."

CHAPTER XII.

A JOLLY LAY-OUT.

THE battle over, Dick was naturally the hero of the hour, that is with a proportion of the population—those who had made a nice little roll of money on bets.

Mayor Murphy's wallet fairly overflowed, and Jackson's face was like a sunbeam over the cash he had captured.

Dick of course had made nothing but sore knuckles out of the racket, but he had won general public approval, that at once took the shape of an ovation.

At the suggestion, Murphy cried:

"Yes, by jingo! That's the proper caper. The feller stood up and pounded for our amusement, and it did not bring him a red. As representative citizens of Durango, we are honorably in duty bound to give him a grand old blow-out."

"So say I! Let's see if we can take up a collection."

A canvass was made among the crowd, and much to the surprise of the projector of the affair, a considerable sum was collected.

The proprietor of the White Elephant tendered the use of his big bar-room wherein to have the "lay-out," and the news spread all through the camp that Deadwood Dick was to be feasted in honor of his victory.

Eph Sands, who was the Delmonico of Durango, was ordered to get up the biggest supper he knew how to prepare.

Long before the hour set for the fete, the town began to assume a holiday appearance. The young women had on their best clothes, and some of the miners surprised their necks with a white collar.

Of all this Dick was ignorant, until after a thorough cleaning up and a general repair of damages, he left his room and descended to the street. Then he learned the cause of the commotion.

A crowd was assembled in front of the White Elephant.

What was termed a Silver Cornet Band—the remnant of a stranded theatrical company, were endeavoring to murder the music of Strauss, but if poor Strauss had been there, he could have saved them much breath, and all the trouble by dropping dead on the spot.

"Well, what is all this racket about?" Dick asked of a bystander.

"Why, it's in your honor?"

"Mine?"

"Yes. The citizens are goin' to feast you, for doin' up Brandon. Mayor Mike Murphy has charge of all the arrangements, and he don't do things by halves. We're goin' to have a gay old blow-out and all in your honor."

"Well, I don't know about that."

"Don't know about what?"

"Having anything to do with such a fandango."

"Why not?"

"Because I am not a professional prize-fighter. I did not fight Brandon for either notoriety or money."

"We all know that, but you made money for your backers, and they are going to do the square old biz by you, and no mistake."

Just then Murphy came rushing up with extended hands.

"Ah! my beloved fellow-countryman, it gives me infinite pleasure to see you looking so bright and blooming. I don't see as you got hurt very bad."

"Well, no; only a few bruises."

"And have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Why, we are going to banquet you, my boy—we're going to banquet you. We are going to give ye one of the biggest blow-outs there ever was in Durango."

"You are foolish!"

"How so?"

"Because I do not care for so much fuss over a trifle."

"Over a trifle, hey? And d'ye call the lickin' of Ned Brandon a trifle?"

"I do. He is plucky, but he is no fighter."

The guests were now beginning to assemble; so taking Dick by the arm, the mayor pulled him into the White Elephant.

The card-tables had been transformed into dining-tables, and fairly groaned beneath the mass of meats and delicacies.

It was about the biggest feed Dick had ever run across in the wild West, and it was near midnight when the royster party broke up.

Dick wanted to get away, knowing that Scott would be impatient, awaiting his coming.

He found his aide in anything but an amiable mood.

"Bout time you put in an appearance. I'm getting well tired of this job."

"Sorry, but I was kept against my will; what have you seen or heard?"

"Nothing."

"Did you see Wyndham leave the house?"

"Yes. He went toward town."

"Did you see him when he returned?"

"I did."

"There's no use of hanging around here, any longer, to-night, then, you think?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, we will go back to the hotel."

They were just setting forth, when the sharp report of a rifle sounded close at hand, and Scott dropped like a log.

"I'm shot," he moaned.

At the same instant a voice cried out:

"Gathered in!"

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE DRIFT.

IN the darkness Dick could not tell from whence the shot had come, not having seen the flash. He presumed, however, that it came from the rear, as the voice sounded in that direction.

He noticed another thing, too.

The voice was not that of Calamity Jane, Junior, but rather was that of a man.

Leaving Scott where he had fallen he rushed off to the rear and—into trouble.

He had not gone twenty paces when he received a stunning blow on the head, and with a groan, fell insensible.

When he awoke he was in a strange place.

It evidently was a room or chamber in a mine, which had been fitted up for a mine-boss, for there were odd pieces of furniture here and there, showing that it had been tenanted.

Dick sat propped up against the wall, securely bound.

He was not alone, for three men sat in the firelight of an immense fireplace. These three were Wesley Wyndham, Ned Brandon, with his swollen face all patched up with court-plaster, and an ex-convict, named O'Leary, who had a big reputation in Durango, for having killed his half-dozen men.

They were conversing between drinks, and their backs being turned, it was several minutes before they noticed Dick's return to consciousness, so he heard a part of their conversation.

Wyndham was speaking.

"Well, we were in luck to capture the cuss so easy."

"You're right we were!" assented O'Leary.

"He is a tough baste."

"We will take some of the toughness out of him," Wyndham declared.

"So we will, bedad!"

"You can thank me for his capture," put in Brandon. "If I had not put a hole through old Scott's head, we would have had a harder job."

"True. But I am sorry you killed the old man."

"Good riddance. He was never any use to himself or to any one else," replied Brandon, heartlessly.

"It will create a big stir in Durango, for he was well liked."

"What do I care? No one will know who killed him."

"I wouldn't like to be in your boots if this Deadwood Dick ever gets free, me lad," remarked O'Leary. "He won't stop for any sluggin' business now. You will get popped over at first sight."

"You bet he will!"

It was Dick who spoke.

The three villains gazed around with a start, as if some departed spirit had addressed them.

"Ah!" called Wyndham. "You are awake, are you?"

"As you see."

"How do you like the situation?"

"Bully!"

"You won't like it so well, directly."

"This seems to be a pretty comfortable sort of a prison."

"Not for you. You are entirely too fresh to be running loose."

"Is that so?"

"It was an unlucky day for you when you came to Durango. We shall make an example of you, as a warning to others of your kind. In what manner or fashion would you prefer to pass in your checks? You have your choice of a number of popular and effective methods."

"Well," replied Dick, "I shall go to New York, take an ocean steamer, ride to mid-

ocean, and jump overboard. How's that for an original suggestion?"

"Oh, you'll never see the ocean. If you had said you were going to visit Satan, you would have hit the nail on the head."

"Thanks for the intimation. Satan and I are on the outs. He's been offering me the job of head boss over the furnace-stokers for years, but my wages were too high, and he got mad and took another man. It would cost me too much for ice to work in a hot place like the Inferno."

"Blame me, if you ain't a cool one!" Wyndham said, grimly.

"Well, I always try to keep cool in the summer time. I was once known to freeze a can of cream for a candy man by my own frigidity."

Wyndham turned to his companions.

"Let's come to business. I want to be away from here by daybreak."

"I suggest the rope, as the quickest and the easiest," spoke up the ex-convict.

"I've a better plan than that!" said Ned Brandon.

"What is it?"

"That we each take a revolver, and fill him so full of holes that you could fire a stone through him anywhere."

Wyndham and O'Leary both opposed this proposition. They had no taste for such assassination.

"I'll tell you what we had better do," said O'Leary. "This place is strong, and no one ever comes near it. Let's lock the cuss in, and come back to-morrow night all prepared. He will be safe."

"Good idea!" assented Wyndham. "In the mean time we can conclude over a bottle of wine just what to do with him."

And so they retired.

After the trio had gone and the door safely fastened on the other side, Dick had plenty of time for reflection.

"Well," he soliloquized, "here I am in a hole again—in the soup, as they say out East. I wonder how I shall get out of this dilemma? I've got out of many another one and I do not think my luck will desert me now."

As for the bonds that bound him Dick cared not a whit. He could scorch and then easily burst them asunder. The real difficulty was the escape.

Three sides of the room were solid rock, as also was the ceiling, but this had crevices in it through which the smoke escaped.

The fourth wall was of tough oaken plank, two inches thick and bolted to heavy lateral beams.

The door was heavy like the plank, and the hinges and lock were on the other side.

This practically shut off all means of escape, unless the person had the proper tools to work with.

The first move was to roll over until the fire was reached. Then it was short work to free his hands and feet.

The fire was burning low, but there was plenty of wood and he soon had a cheery blaze, that lit the room up brightly.

This done he lit a cigar and sat down in the firelight to ruminant.

Examining his pockets he found that none of their contents had been molested; he even still possessed his revolvers.

"That's one streak of good fortune, anyhow!" he said. "It will give me a chance to defend my life, and I shall not hesitate to do it. When they come back they will expect to find me bound, as they left me, and will walk right into my trap. If there ain't too many of them, and, I reckon there won't be, I can pick 'em off in a jiffy. This seems to be all there is left for me to do!"

"I wish I had a keg of powder, and I'd blow myself out," he added.

But he now had only one round of cartridges. If he had had more, he could have tapped them as he had done on several previous occasions, and withdrawn the powder.

Finally an idea occurred to him.

There was no flooring to his room, and at the front, along the upright slabs, was real earth of a clayey nature, and quite free from stone.

Might he not be able to burrow his way out from under the wooden wall?

The idea was not a bad one, particularly as he had a good, strong, broad-bladed hunting-knife, which he could use in lieu of a spade.

His decision made, he pulled off his coat and then began the attack.

The spot he selected was to burrow out under the door.

The compacted clay cut nicely, and lifted out in chunks.

"By jingo, if there's any place beyond here, I am bound to find it," he thought, greatly encouraged.

The cavity rapidly enlarged, as he quarried out block after block.

"I allow there will be some tall cussin', when they come back, and find me gone!" Dick chuckled. "Old Wyndham will tear his hair, and so will Brandon."

The sapper and miner was soon under the door. Then, he burrowed upward, and in a little while stood in a winding subterranean passage.

"Well, I'm out of one dungeon, but, the question before the investigating committee of one is—haven't I got myself into another? This passage leads to somewhere, and I'll be blamed if I don't find out where."

He crept back into the chamber, secured his coat and returned to the drift.

A big lantern hung outside the door.

He took this in one hand, and, with a revolver in the other, he crept along the passage.

The walls were damp and slimy, and the floor very uneven.

As he advanced, the drift gradually ascended.

It was evidently an abandoned search drift which had never panned out well.

Transverse shutes branched off it at intervals, but Dick did not bother his head about them.

He kept on, and presently uttered a cry. Far ahead, he saw a ray of light!

"I'm on the right track!" he ejaculated.

"Now, for liberty and vengeance!"

He hurried on, but suddenly paused.

What was this he heard?

He listened.

It was a cry of distress.

And a woman's voice, too!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOST GIRL FOUND.

It was a woman's voice!

He listened for a repetition of the cry, but there was none.

"Maybe that was Ethel Bly's voice? What is more likely, since this is without doubt old Wyndham's property?"

Dick went on a few paces further, when he came to the mouth of another transverse passage.

Raising his voice, he called loudly.

"Hello, there! Where are you?"

"Here!" came the response. "Help! help!"

The voice came from down the transverse passage.

Up it Dick rushed, flaring his lantern from side to side.

He soon reached to a sheet-iron door in the wall of rock.

"Are you in there?" he cried.

"Yes. Oh! help me out!"

"Have courage! Who are you?"

"I am a prisoner here. My name is Ethel Bly."

"All right! You are the very person I am looking for, Miss Bly. Be of good cheer!"

A cry of joy escaped the prisoner.

"Can you open the door?" she asked.

"Well, I reckon I can, if any one can," replied Dick. "It is heavily padlocked, but, if I can find anything to work with, I will make short work of the locks. Have patience, and I will see what I can find."

So, lantern in hand, he began a lively skirmish through different passages.

After ten minutes of search, he stumbled over an old rusty crow-bar.

This proved conclusively that the mine had not been worked for some time.

Dick, elated, seized the bar, and went back to the door.

Under his savage attacks the locks yielded and in a little while the door was open!

"Come forth!" Dick commanded of the girl prisoner.

Ethel obeyed, but with hands over her eyes.

"Please shade your lantern," she said, "until my eyes get accustomed to it. I have been in utter darkness for weeks!"

Dick immediately lowered the light.

"Your eyes will gradually get accustomed to it," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so. Is there any way to get out of this horrible place?"

"If there is a way to get into it, there must be one to get out."

"Why, how did you come here?"

"As a prisoner, and insensible at that."

"A prisoner of whom?"

"Wesley Wyndham. I am a detective, and was sent here to find you."

"And Wyndham found this out and made you a prisoner, eh?"

"Yes."

"The villain!"

"You are right; he is a villain. But the seal of doom is on his head, as sure as fate. But before he dies, he shall disgorge every cent of your money."

"I hope to get my money, but I fear I won't. How was mother, when you left her?"

"In her usual health, I guess, but fretting about you."

"Poor soul! How soon shall I be able to see her?"

"Shortly. Come, now, let's try and get out of this mine."

The way out was toward the glimmer of light. A brief walk up the ascending passage brought them out into a vacant lot.

They were further up the mountain-side than Dick had anticipated.

Below them Durango lay. She was not just then basking in the sunshine, but was getting a drenching from a terrific rain-storm.

It could hardly be pronounced rain, for the clouds seemed to have parted to let down a perfect deluge of water.

"Oh, let's get back into the passage!" cried Ethel.

"That would be fatal, for some of Wyndham's spies might come. Besides, now is the time to smuggle you into one of the hotels, for the streets are deserted."

"But I shall get soaking wet."

"I will see that you get dry clothes. So come along."

By taking a circuitous route, Dick conducted his fair companion to a little boarding-place, kept by a widow named Jones.

He had dropped in there several times, and had no difficulty in making arrangements for the care of Ethel, telling Mrs. Jones just what had happened. He then went to the hotel where he was staying, and sought his room, not wishing to be seen on the street before night. Weary enough for rest he laid down, and at once dropped off into a deep sleep.

It was dusk when he awoke.

Arising, he took a bath.

It was while doing this that he made an important discovery.

Neatly tucked under the door was a letter addressed to Dick.

It was in a woman's handwriting, too—a decidedly neat hand.

"It's from Ethel," thought Dick, as he tore it open. "She must be in trouble."

It proved not to be from Ethel.

It read as follows:

"I see you have taken another bird under your wings—you whom I loved on first sight. Very well. I am sure you will be happier with her than with me. But, mind you, let my marked people alone, or you will be gathered in with the rest. I still gather 'em in."

"BELLA BRENNAN."

"Well, by blazes! that does take the cake," muttered Dick.

"She is jealous of the rescued girl, but how does she happen to know of the rescue?"

Dick finished his toilet, donned a clever disguise, and went down-stairs.

He found that the girl avenger had been true to her oath; she had in truth been gathering them in.

Sheriff Jackson and his deputy were dead! Mayor Mike Murphy had also been shot, but his wound was not serious.

Dick was standing on a corner, listening to the passing comments, when he felt a slap on his shoulder, and turning he beheld Walt Wyndham.

"Oh! I know you," the latter said. "But, what do you think of this business?"

"What business?"

"This Brennan girl's case!"

"I have no opinion to express," Deadwood Dick replied. "It is none of my affair, anyhow!"

"True. I reckon my old man will be the next?"

"So do I."

"And why so?"

"Because, if the girl don't gather him in, I will."

"What have you against him?"

"Enough to warrant me in killing him at sight—both him and Brandon."

Walt shrugged his shoulders.

"No loss in Brandon's case, and very little about the old gent's."

"You are a winner, in the latter instance, I reckon?"

"No! He wouldn't leave me a red if I was dying for it. Have you any news of Ethel?"

"I have."

"Good! What is it?"

"I have found her!"

"Indeed? That is good news. Where is she?"

"At present, Mr. Wyndham, she is in my care. I have her where she is safe, and I propose to keep her there, until matters are settled. There is more depending than the girl, herself."

"You refer to her money?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wish you all success, but I am afraid the old man has got it penned up where you nor she can ever get it."

"Well, my opinion of your dad is that he's a scamp of the first water, and I am bound to fetch him to justice."

"Hope you do. He's never done any fatherly act to me, and he abused my mother, who is dead. I have hated him, from infancy—I hate him now."

Just then there was heard the report of a rifle, and a man named Raymond fell dead in the street not far away.

Things were beginning to get really alarming.

People who were in the habit of being out at night went home. The wealthy ones went to the Argyle Hotel, and advised with each other how much reward to offer.

On the following morning, circulars were floating about town, bearing this notice:

"\$1,000 REWARD!

"The above sum will be paid for the capture of Bella Brennan dead or alive. COMMITTEE."

Two more men had been found killed.

On the last one found, was this notice:

"Two more yet to gather in."

"CALAMITY JANE, JR."

CHAPTER XV.

INTO TROUBLE AND OUT AGAIN.

THE reward was now big. It was worth trying for anyhow, so many of the citizens of the town argued.

But to earn the reward was altogether another matter. Men in plenty were to be found who would gladly do the work if they could, but to tackle Calamity Jane was a serious matter.

That she meant business needed no proving, for the proof was shown in the slaying for vengeance of those under her ban, and there was good cause for the other murderers of her father to tremble.

Deadwood Dick shared some of the anxiety, too, and not without cause. The note he had received from the woman avenger gave him something to think about.

He was hunting down Wesley Wyndham in order to make him restore the money he had stolen from Ethel Bly, but to press him further, at present, evidently, would be to incur the enmity of the desperate Brennan girl.

She had warned him to keep away from her "marked" ones, under penalty of being "gathered in" himself if he disregarded the warning.

"She's a Tartar," he said to himself, "and would as lieve pop me over as not. I'll have to be wary of her, but she can't scare me off. I must get that other girl's money for her before the Fury gets in her fine work on Wyndham."

The storm had cleared and the day was a cloudless one.

"I believe I will take another ride," Dick decided, when he had thought the matter over carefully. "I'll go out where I had the interview with the girl outlaw upon the other occasion and perhaps I'll see her again. If I do, I can arrange a truce with her, perhaps. I have neither desire nor inclination to be 'gathered in' with the rest of her flock."

Getting his horse, he mounted and rode out of town.

Many curious glances followed him. The citizens were wondering, no doubt, where he was going, when the town was so beside itself with excitement, but, little the brave detective cared for their thoughts.

When about two miles from town, as on the other occasion, he stopped as near the same place as he could locate the spot, and dismounting, took a seat on a log and allowed his horse to nip the grass near by.

He had been there barely a minute, when he heard some one stir in the bushes on his right, and a voice demanded:

"What brings you here?"

It was a woman's voice, and as Dick looked up the bushes parted and Belle Brennan stepped out into sight.

"I came here with the hope of seeing you again," Dick made reply. "I could not have done better if we had had a time appointed, it seems," he added.

"Why, did you expect to find me here?"

"Bless you, I didn't, but I hoped I could if I remained long enough. It was near here that I saw you before, and I concluded that this is the trail leading to your place of hiding."

"You guessed aright, sir; it is. And I was going there, too, when I heard your horse coming, and stepped into the bushes to let you pass."

"Had no desire to meet any one, then, eh?"

"No, not yet. My work is not done."

"How many have you gathered in?"

"All but one, now."

"And who is that one?"

"Wesley Wyndham."

"You do not mean to allow one to escape, eh?"

"Why should I? Did they not commit a horrible crime, murdering my helpless father as they did? They shall all die, I have sworn it."

"And you have threatened to gather me in, too, along with the rest," Dick remarked carelessly.

"No, I have not. I warned you that I would do so, however, if you interfered with my work. Do not do that if you value your life. I hate to spare you, even as it is, but I will, because—"

"What is your reason?"

"Because I love you. It is for that reason, too, that I hate to spare you. I know your secret, as my note told you."

"You think I love Ethel Bly?"

"Why, of course you do! Have you not risked your life for her? What more do I want in the way of proof?"

Dick laughed.

"You reason just like a woman," he declared. "I do not love the girl. Of that I assure you. I have rescued her because that is the business that brought me here to this town. I am a detective by profession. I am simply working out a case."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Of course I am."

"And you do not love her, then?"

"I do not, nor has she any regard for me. Truth to tell, she has made a conquest in another direction."

"I wish I could believe you. Who is her lover?"

"Walt Wyndham."

"How do you know it?"

"Why, he told me himself. It was love at first sight."

"Well do I know what that means. I told you in my note that I love you. If you will make me your wife, Deadwood Dick, I will make you rich."

"I am sorry, miss, but I can't do it," answered Dick, gently. "I might do a great deal worse, but I am not on the market. I am too much of a wanderer, and my heart is too hardened. A wife for me is not to be thought of for years to come."

"Then let us say no more about it. From this moment my course is determined. Remember this when you see me in death."

"Which I hope will not be my misfortune. You are too young and pretty to talk of death."

"Life has nothing for me. But, enough. What did you want to see me about?"

"I want to make a deal with you."

"What is it?"

"You have threatened to kill me if I interfere with any of your marked men."

"And I meant it. There is only one left now, however."

"And that one is the very man I must bring to account."

"What have you to settle with Wyndham?"

"He has robbed an innocent girl. I must force him to disgorge the money he has taken from Ethel Bly."

"Well, you can do that, and still leave him to me."

"That is just the point. Knowing you meant business, I thought it best to see you before I sought another interview with the man."

"I will come to terms with you on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you will not arrest Wyndham, but leave him to me, after you have made him give up the money."

"It is a bargain. I'll do it. That is just what I wanted of you."

"Then our interview is ended. Good-by, Deadwood Dick, and good-by forever. When next you see my face it will be in death."

With that she turned and walked rapidly

away, and although Dick called to her to stop, she gave him no attention.

"Poor girl!" he mused, as he watched her till she disappeared, "I can hardly blame her for the revenge she is seeking. There is danger that she will be caught, however, and if she is they will make short work of her in the town. She had better stop now and get away while she can."

He stood silent and thoughtful for some time, but finally mounted again and set out on his return to town.

Only a little distance, however, had he gone, when he met a surprise.

"Hands up, thar!"

Such was the startling order, and two men sprung out into the road in front of him.

Deadwood Dick was in their hands neatly. The men were Brandon and O'Leary.

"Up with your hands," Brandon repeated, "or we'll tumble you out of that saddle without any nonsense about it."

"Dhat's dhe chune, b'gobs!" echoed O'Leary. "Up wid 'em, or down comes yer kerkiss, an' yez hear phwat Oi say?"

There was no way out of it, so Dick had to comply.

"Anything to be obliging," he quickly assented.

"You will oblige us further still, before we are done with you," declared Ned Brandon. "You did a cute thing in getting out of our hands, but we have doubled on you and your game is up."

"Yez kin bet yer loife it is!" chimed in the Celt.

"Well, in what way can I oblige you?" Dick asked.

"By turning your horse into this by-path," returned Brandon, and following my partner, while I cover you from behind with my rifle."

"And what will come next?"

"You will learn all in good time, and you'll find that you didn't make anything by your escape and rescue of that girl."

"And if I decline to go with you, what then?"

"We'll leave you here in the road, dead, just as sure as you're born."

Dick saw that they meant it—that he was in a dilemma, and the way to get out of it did not appear.

But, there was nothing for him to do except to follow directions, so he allowed O'Leary to take the horse by the head and lead it, while Brandon followed after.

Dick hoped that something would occur to give him a chance to draw his revolvers, when he would make music in the air for the fellows in about as short a time as they could think about.

In another moment, however, another startling thing happened.

There came the report of a rifle; then Dick heard a groan and fall behind him.

The Irishman looked quickly around, as also did Dick, and they beheld Brandon lying in the dust.

In almost the same second the rifle spoke again, and down went O'Leary.

Dick was amazed.

"I seem to have a friend around here," he reflected. "Who can it be, unless it's young Wyndham?"

He was looking in the direction from which the shots had come, and presently a person came in sight, rifle in hand.

That person was none other than Calamity Jane, Jr.

"You see me again in life, after all," she observed.

"And you have done me a big favor," returned Dick. "Have you killed the fellows?"

"That's what I fired to do. It was their life or yours, as I well knew. I happened to see them, as I looked back from the hill, and well knowing they meant mischief to you, I came back this way on the run. I hated to kill, but Brandon was making ready

to kill you. He had stopped, and was in the act of raising his rifle, when I fired. But, once more, farewell. I have business elsewhere."

CHAPTER XVI.

DEADWOOD DICK'S CLOSE CALL.

DICK looked after the girl as before.

"She is a daring one," he mused, "and has good faith in me, knowing the reward that is offered for her, and how easily I could assure her capture."

The girl did not look back, but went steadily up the trail, her rifle upon her shoulder. She showed no fear of any one.

"She will be taken yet, before she is ready," Dick reflected. "She had better have a care how she keeps to the main roads. Let her be taken, and she will be hanged as surely as I see her now. The roughs and toughs of Durango are now fierce for her life."

At that moment a shout broke upon his ears, and he turned in the direction from which it came.

There, just coming into sight over a ledge, were half a dozen horsemen, who had caught sight of the girl outlaw.

"Thar she be!" he heard their leader yell. "Come on, boyees, and we'll have her, and then we'll finger that prize money!"

All urged on their horses, and came down the slope at full gallop.

Dick looked in the direction of the hunted young woman just in time to see her give a wave of defiance as she disappeared into the bushes.

Dick could not forget the service she had so recently rendered him, and felt in duty bound to return the favor. There was little time to debate the question, had he felt inclined to do so, so he acted immediately.

Wheeling his horse, he dashed down to the main trail, and, stopping right in front of the on-coming horsemen, leveled his revolvers at them and commanded them to come to a halt—which the astonished pursuers proceeded to do in all haste.

"Hold up here, men, and give an account of yourselves," Dick ordered.

"What be ye stoppin' us fer?" the leader hotly demanded. "We're after that murderer, and we almost had her, too."

"So I observe," Dick returned.

"And what d'ye mean by it?"

"I'm going to give her ten minutes in which to escape from you."

"No yer won't, nuther! Forward, men! Ride ther cuss down!"

"Move a step at your peril!" warned Dick, grimly. "Keep up your hands, every one of you, too. I'm in command, here, just now!"

They did not disobey, though they stormed furiously.

"Ther cuss is in league with ther gal!" one accused.

"Yas, and he'd orter swing with her, too," echoed another.

"Tarnation! Jest look a thar!" cried a third, pointing up the by-path, where the two bodies lay.

"More murder, eh?" roared the leader. "You'll swing with ther gal fer this, me fine feller."

"It does not look like it at present," responded Dick, carelessly. "I seem to hold the best hand at present. Keep up your hands, there, or taste lead."

The party fretted and fumed, and swore viciously, but all to no purpose, for the resolute Richard held them covered and did not let his eyes wander for a second.

"Did you kill these men?" the leader demanded.

"I am happy to say I did not," was the answer Dick made. "I had a close call from them, however, and only for the girl,

would now be where they are. She saved me."

"Ther deuce, yer say!"

"It's a fact. They were about to do for me for balking a little game of theirs, when the girl took a hand in it and dropped them. You see, I owe her my life, and I am returning the favor by holding you here at bay for a time."

"But you'll git inter wuss trouble by it, see if yer don't."

"I'll take the chances of that. Keep your hands well up there, or there is danger that you'll get hurt."

So he held them until the ten minutes were about up, and he was sure that Belle Brennan had placed herself well beyond their reach.

"Now," he said, finally, drawing his horse to one side, "ride on and if you can find the girl you will be smarter than I take you to be. Be off or the trail will be so cold you'll never pick it up."

There was no more delay. The pursuers urged their horses on, and soon passed out of range, while the detective went on in the direction of the town.

"They'll never find her," he mused. "She is too smart for fellows of their stamp, and she must be well out of danger by this time. Well, now that I have made a treaty with the avenger, I will pay a visit to Wyndham's den again, and force him to terms. First, though, I must make sure that Ethel is safe. I do not feel satisfied on that point since Brandon halted me."

He put his horse to good speed, and soon swung into Durango, to make his way immediately to the house where he had left Ethel.

As he drew near he saw her coming out, and called to her.

She looked at him in surprise.

"Where are you going to?" he asked.

"Why," was the answer, "I was just going to meet you, as your note directed."

"I have sent you no note," Dick declared. "You have been imposed upon, and would have walked into a trap had I not been just in time."

"Is it possible! What an escape I have had! Who was it that sent the note?"

"I cannot say, but it is certain that it was Wyndham or his tools. Two of them will bother you no more, however."

"Why, what has become of them? Have you put them under arrest? I hope you have. That is what they all deserve, and I'd like to see them get their dues."

"It is worse than that," Dick returned.

"They are dead. But, I must go on. Return into the house, and keep yourself close. I will send you no such notes as the one you have received, so do not be deceived again."

The girl went back into the house, and Dick rode away.

Some time later he was at the Wyndham mansion.

The Chinaman answered his ring.

"Is your employer in?" Dick asked.

"No, him not in," the Celestial replied.

"Where is he?"

"Gone out."

"Fool! I mean, where has he gone to?"

"Allee samee don't know," the Chinaman returned, sleepily.

Dick pushed past him into the hall.

"I'll take a look around, while he is out, then," he observed. "Have you any objections? If you have it don't make any difference, so you needn't take the trouble to say anything."

The Chinaman looked as if at loss what to do.

"Shut the door," Dick directed, "and then lead the way to the room where the safe is."

The "pig-tail" obeyed the first order, and set about obeying the second.

He led the way to the door of the middle room, and threw it open.

"Go right in," Dick further directed.

"I'd rather have you in front than behind me. You are harmless when I can watch you."

The Celestial went in, Dick following.

No sooner had he crossed the sill, however, than a startling command greeted him:

"Up with your hands!" was the ringing order.

There stood Wesley Wyndham, with a cocked and leveled six-shooter in hand.

Deadwood Dick had been neatly overreached, but, he was not yet overcome, as the next instant proved.

The Chinaman was right in front of him, and giving him a quick push he dashed him against Wyndham, and the latter went to the floor with a crash.

The revolver went off, but the bullet did no damage.

Deadwood Dick's own weapons were in hand immediately, and he held the advantage by big odds.

"Get up," he ordered, "and we'll talk the matter over. You were ready to give me a warm reception."

"Curse you!" the enraged man cried, "do you bear a charmed life?"

"I've heard men say so," Dick responded, smiling.

"And I believe it."

Wyndham got up, and Dick ordered him to a seat.

"Now," he said, "I'll give you your choice of two things: You must either restore that money you took from Miss Bly, or I'll put you under arrest and see that you get what you deserve—the State's Prison!"

"I can laugh at you," was the sneering retort. "That girl is by this time a prisoner again, and you'll never find her."

Dick smiled.

"She might have been, but your plans didn't succeed," he responded. "Your two boss rascals, on the other hand, are dead, while Ethel is safe. You are doubly foiled and wholly in my power now."

"Whom do you mean is dead?"

"Brandon and O'Leary."

The master of the house looked frightened.

"Who killed them?" he inquired, excitedly.

"The Brennan girl, who is avenging the death of her father. She has gathered them all in but one now."

"And that one—"

"Is yourself. She is after you, and I would not give a cent for your life. I would not be in your boots for all the gold in the mines of Durango."

"She must be captured!" the frightened man cried. "I will raise that reward to five thousand at once."

"It will not do you any good. She is safe enough, I believe, and it is only a question of hours when she will come to gather you."

"Heavens! Can't you help me out of it?"

"Yes, certainly; I can lodge you in the jail, and, later on, into State's Prison, if you prefer that rather than to yield to my demand."

"What was your demand?"

"The money you owe that young lady."

"I will pay it. I can't do it now, however."

"Why not now as well as another time? Come, there must be no—"

Dick suddenly stopped, wheeled half-around, drawing one of his revolvers.

There was the crack of a cartridge, and a bullet grazed his cheek.

Instantly his own weapon spoke, and a man dropped to the floor.

But it was not over. Two more sprung at him, both with knives in hand. He was in a tight place.

While talking to Wyndham, he had noticed that his eyes were looking beyond him, and suspecting treachery, had turned just in the nick of time. Another moment, and it would have been too late.

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL GATHERED IN.

DICK fired again, promptly.

Another of the rascals went down.

But now the Chinaman, armed with a gun, was upon him.

Dick sprung forward, just as he was bringing it up to fire, and struck it away.

The weapon exploded, and its load was buried in the wall, making a hole as big as a man's fist.

There was a lively time in that room, but it did not last long, for Dick made a dash for the door, and out, just as Wyndham began to rain bullets after him from the revolver he had recovered.

"Balked again!" Dick muttered, as he made his way to the hotel. "But, my time will come. I'll wait till night, now."

It was after dark when he next appeared upon the street.

He was in disguise, but, keen eyes had been watching for him, and his disguise did not serve him. The eyes of love are sharp, 'tis said.

He had not gone far from the hotel when a hand fell upon his arm, and turning, he found himself in the presence of the girl outlaw.

She, too, was in disguise.

"Have you settled with Wyndham?" she asked.

"No, for he came near settling with me," was the answer.

"Then I will wait no longer. I must gather him in this night, for it is getting too hot for me. There is danger that they will nab me before my work is done, and that must not be. I must gather him in before I go."

"You had better be satisfied with the score you have made, and get away," the detective advised. "I wish you would escape while you can."

"Never! They shall all be gathered in! They came near getting me this afternoon, and would, only for you. I must thank you for what you did. And now, adieu forever. We shall never meet in life again."

Just then old Wyndham passed them and entered the saloon.

The girl was gone in another instant.

Not being particularly interested in the work of the Brennan girl, Dick bothered his head but little about her.

He meant to do what he had promised in the case, and no more.

Ethel's money must be recovered, at all hazards.

So he waited in the vicinity of the White Elephant Saloon, until he saw old Wyndham leave it.

The night was dark, and before he was scarcely aware of it, the detective had lost track of his man.

So he returned to the little boarding-house where he had left Ethel. He found her in better spirits.

"You are to come with me," Dick announced.

"Where to?"

"To recover your money. Now is our chance."

The walk to the Wyndham mansion was not a long one; but when the house was reached it was found to be perfectly dark; not a ray of light was to be seen anywhere.

"I reckon it's all right," Dick said, and they entered the grounds.

"You haven't got a key?" asked Ethel.

"No; but I have brought tools with me that will force an entrance."

"You're not a burglar?"

"No. But men in my profession often have to carry burglar's tools."

They stole to the side-door.

It was locked.

Dick listened a moment; then he peered through the keyhole.

"There may be no one at home, but there is a light in there," he said. "We will soon see."

He then went to work with the jimmy, and very readily forced the door open.

"Now, come," he ordered Ethel.

"I am afraid," the girl faltered.

"Nonsense," replied Dick. "I will see that no harm comes to you."

So they entered.

The kitchen was empty.

But, in the parlor a strange sight was to be seen.

Upon the sofa lay Wesley Wyndham, cold in death.

Not far away lay the Chinaman, also dead.

And, to cap the climax, seated upon a sofa, was Calamity Jane, Jr., also dead.

Upon her breast was pinned the insignia:

"THEY ARE ALL GATHERED IN."

And so it afterward proved.

There is little more to add.

Ethel returned to her mother with her fortune, which was found in Wyndham's safe. Walt went with her as her husband.

Dick immediately left Durango on an important mission.

Of the other characters, there is nothing to add.

THE END.

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